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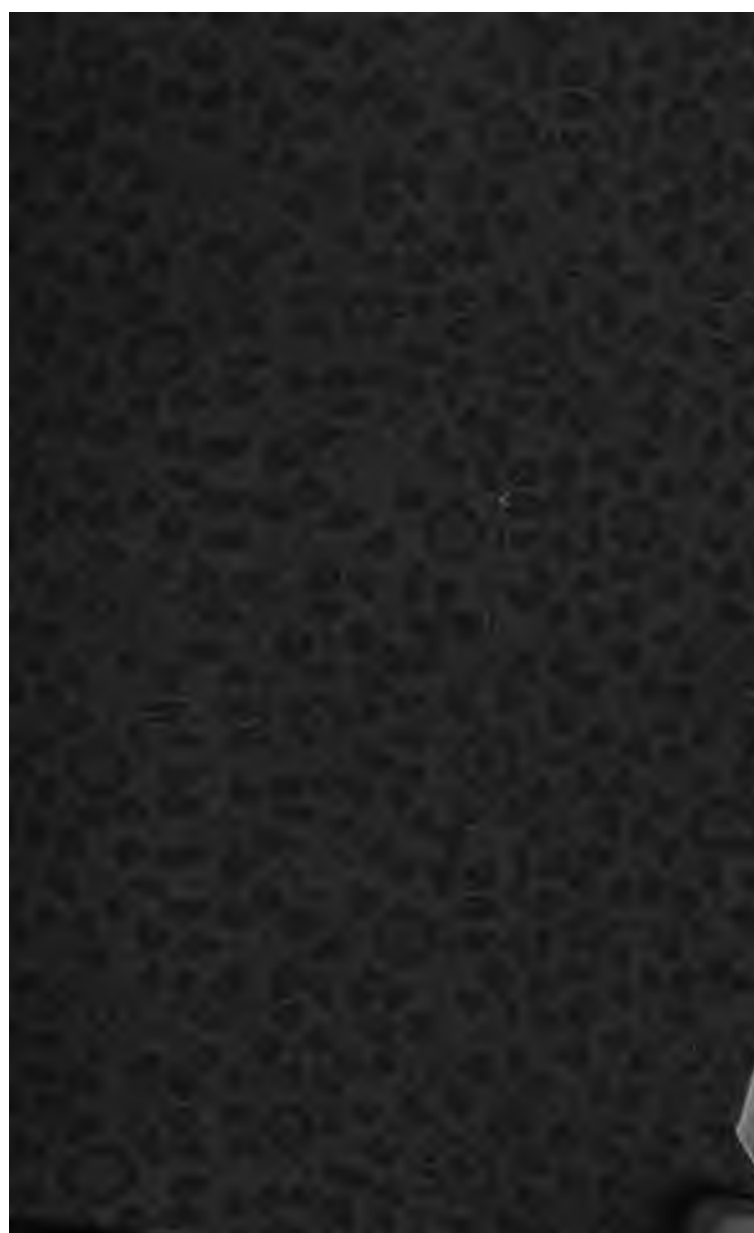
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SISTER SUE



BY
ISMAY THORN







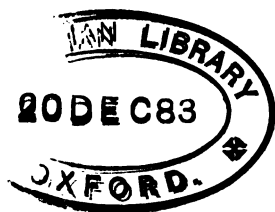
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TO
EFFIE AND HELENA.



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SISTER SUE.

CHAPTER I.

THE FAMILY ARE INTRODUCED.

SUE has gone fast asleep in her arm-chair, and the fire has followed her example and gone fast asleep too. Only a few red ashes remain to tell that it was once a fine blaze.

Sue is very sound asleep. She does not hear the door open, and her father's exclamation of surprise on finding the room in darkness, nor does she wake when he comes forward, and taking the matches from their place, lights the lamp and puts it on the table. And then as he turns round, he catches sight of Sue.

Sue is fifteen years of age, and she is tall and slight : her fair hair falls in little curls on her forehead, and is coiled up in a big twist at the back of her head. She is a very pretty girl, with a rather grown-up, elder-sisterly

manner, which has come upon her lately, since her mother's death left her to take the lead at home.

There she lies, fast asleep, the fire is almost out, the kettle is cold, and the tea-things are upon the table, but the teapot is empty, and the toast has not been ordered.

Dr. Rutherford looks at his sleeping daughter, and smiles a little sadly. Then he rings the bell, orders the toast and some boiling water, and Sue wakes as he takes the poker, in the hopeless attempt to improve the fire.

"Oh! papa, have you come home? and the tea is not made—and—oh! what a miserable fire! I am so sorry!"

"You seem very tired, Sue," answers her father, with a comical glance at her tumbled hair; "I thought I had come upon the Sleeping Beauty, or some enchanted princess, when I came in."

"Oh! papa, and this wretched fire—it won't keep in! What am I to do about it?"

"Try and keep awake, my child, and then you will be able to attend to it. How are the children?"

"Very well. Eve said her lessons quite nicely to-day, and she was very good in the schoolroom. She was only there an hour. Papa—it will be her birthday to-morrow—she is just four."

"The twelfth of December—ah! so it is. Poor little Eve!" and Dr. Rutherford sighs wearily.

"And I wanted," says Sue, looking up at him, "to ask you about Eve's birthday."

"What about it?"

"Are we to keep it, papa, just the same? she said something about it yesterday."

"Keep it as you like, Sue," answers her father quickly ;
"Miss Griggs can give you all a holiday, I suppose, and Eve can have a cake if she wants one."

"Very well, papa."

At that moment Rachel brings in the hot teapot, and nice fresh toast, and Dr. Rutherford and Sue sit down to tea.

"Rachel," says Dr. Rutherford, "if Miss Sue goes to sleep another evening, you had better come in and wake her, or on my busy nights I shall probably have to go without tea."

"Yes, sir," says Rachel grimly.

Sue colours a little, and looks half reproachfully at her father, then, wishing to change the subject, her next remark is,

"I had a letter from Rupert this afternoon, papa. He is coming home on the 21st."

"Ah ! and how has he been getting on ?"

"He doesn't say, but he wants you to give him a gun, papa, because he has made great friends with Justin Meadows, and has been asked to go out shooting with him some day, when they come home."

"What nonsense ! The boy can't shoot—but I will see about it when he comes home. What has Valentine done at school to-day ?"

"Oh ! papa, Val is so tiresome, that we don't know what to do about him. Mr. Maskell has given him a dreadful imposition to write, and he is so rude to Miss Griggs, and so tiresome with Floss, that there is no peace when he is at home."

"You must try and be good to him for another six

months, Sue. He is going to join Rupert at Winchester then. I do not think it will do Val any good if I interfere, and I confess that Flossy's prim ways are very tempting for a schoolboy to tease about."

"But it is so bad for Paul and Sydney, for they are learning to behave just like Val, and they think it very grand to be rude and troublesome. It is a great pity."

"So it is, Sue, but Paul and Sydney are just at an age when little boys are beginning to be bigger boys, and are not so easily managed as they were a year ago. I doubt whether poor Val has really much to do with it. But I will speak to Miss Griggs about them."

"And they're so rude to Miss Griggs, papa; they have learnt an expression somewhere, 'as merry as a grig,' and they are always asking Miss Griggs if she is merry, and they behave so badly about it."

Dr. Rutherford, however, only laughs.

"You must have patience with them, Sue. And now, after this long list of complaints, have you nothing pleasant to tell me of them?"

"Oh! yes, papa. Baby is as good as gold all day long, and Eve is very good too, but the others are so tiresome—"

"My dear child, I want you to have more consideration for those younger and more thoughtless than yourself. You should remember that you sometimes fail to do what you have undertaken. I do not mean to reproach you, Sue, but in all the years that your mother and I were married, I never came home once to find the fire out and the tea not ready, and since I have depended on you, this has occurred frequently. I do not ask so

much of you, my child, you are only fifteen, and I do not expect to find you a woman all at once. I am sure you do not *mean* to be careless and forgetful, and as far as I can, I take the will for the deed. Therefore you should remember that, when you judge your brothers and sisters so harshly."

Poor Sue looks very much distressed for a moment, then she says quickly,

"I will try, papa. I *wish* I did not forget so very often!"

"We all forget sometimes, Sue, but if we try bravely, we shall learn to remember in time. But I do not want you to be worried more than I can help. I will see about Val, and when he is more with Rupert, he is sure to improve. But for Floss and the little boys, you and Miss Griggs must do what you can with them. But you must not forget that they will not bear from a *sister*, what they obeyed without a murmur from their mother. She had the right to command obedience, and you have only the power of asking it. You must learn the difference."

"Oh! yes, I know, papa," says Sue, "and I do try to be as kind as I can, but Eve is the only one that really attends to what I say."

At that moment the clock strikes the half-hour, Dr. Rutherford springs up, swallows the remains of his cup of tea standing, and begins a search for his gloves.

"Here they are, papa," says Sue, "and your hat. When will you be home again?"

"Have supper at nine, don't wait if I am later. Good-bye, my Sue, and keep up your courage," and with a

sigh, that shows how much Dr. Rutherford is in need of courage himself, he goes away, and Sue hears the wheels of his chaise until they die away down the silent road.

Then she rings for Rachel to clear the table, and runs up to Miss Griggs and the schoolroom. Miss Griggs is seated at the schoolroom table, endeavouring to keep order during a somewhat noisy tea. She is a careworn young lady, with a sad love story, whose outward sign is the mourning hair-ring on the third finger of her left hand. She is always very much shocked and astonished when the children are unruly, but as they have been unruly under her guidance for the last two years, the astonishment has grown rather flat, and even the little ones have begun to see through the feeble surprise which always greets any outbreak.

Eve has only recently been promoted to schoolroom tea, since Sue has taken hers with her father, and there she sits in her high chair, her chubby little face bent over her bowl of bread and milk, quite absorbed in the difficulties of manipulating her spoon.

Valentine, aged thirteen, just come back from the day school at which he is preparing for public-school life, is sitting by Miss Griggs, with a very shock head of hair, and a blot of ink on the tip of his nose. He is at an age when washing is one of the great trials and inconveniences of life, and he has always some wonderful excuse for appearing so unkempt at the tea table.

Floss sits beside him, a little maiden of ten, correct in costume, and as fair and fresh as much soap and water, and hair brushes can make her. She eats her bread and

butter in a neat, prim fashion, that drives unruly Val nearly wild with disgust.

Paul, aged seven, and Sydney, aged five, are two fat little boys, sitting huddled up in their chairs, their little, black sailor collars nearly touching their ears; Paul, with his dreamy eyes fixed on the bread and butter plate, Sydney, like a little piece of quicksilver by his side, never still, never silent, never weary.

As Sue comes in there is a moment's silence, then Val calls out,

"I say, Sue, what time is father coming in?"

"Not till after your bed-time," says Sue, with some satisfaction in her manner; "he will be very tired, Val, and you must see him to-morrow at breakfast."

"I'm not going to bed till I've written that beastly imposition!" says Val decidedly, "so you needn't begin to order me about, Sue. I've got a hundred lines to write out before school to-morrow, and it must be done."

"You ought to get up in the morning to do it," answers Sue gravely; "it's no punishment to you to sit up at night. But you can't come down and worry papa to-night."

"You don't know anything about it!" retorts Val quickly; "I've as much right to be with father as you have, and I don't worry him with complaints, as you always do!"

Sue, perhaps feeling the justice of this remark, makes no answer, and turning to Miss Griggs she asks some question about to-morrow's lessons. Soon after the tea-things are taken away; Paul, Sydney, and Eve are banished to play in the nursery, and the others all set to

work upon their different occupations ; Val, with a squeaky quill pen, to write his lines ; Floss, to work at an aggravatingly correct and elaborate sampler ; and Sue, at a poem of Alfred de Vigny's, which she is learning by heart.

Miss Griggs takes out her desk, and begins to sigh over its old treasures, until between the squeaky pen and Miss Griggs' sighs, Sue loses patience, and carries off her book to the parlour.



CHAPTER II.

A FIRST EFFORT.

“NOW I know how it will be,” thinks Sue, as she makes up the fire, and settles herself in the arm-chair with her book; “Val will come down here and worry papa, and there will be no rest for him this evening. Val is very tiresome, he never considers that as papa’s eldest daughter I am of course more likely to be with him than a rough, rude boy of his age, who really ought to be at a public school. It will be more comfortable, I hope, when Rupert comes home, and I hope also that he will help to manage Val, and keep him in his place. If only Val and Floss could be mixed up together and then divided! He is so careless and untidy, and she is so prim and priggish, in her way she is almost as aggravating as he is. And—oh! here he comes already, and I have not *half* learnt my poetry, and I shall have no time now, for it is impossible to learn anything in the room with Val. It’s too bad that he should come down now, and when I wanted to be quiet too!”

The result is that Sue receives Val with a very forbidding look, and forgets all the time that she has been wasting before he came in.

"Now, Val, please, I want you to be very quiet, because I have got my French poetry to learn, and you know I *can't* learn—"

"What? Haven't you done that thing yet? Why, I'd have learnt twice as much in the time. You've just been sitting here doing nothing, I believe, and that's why you haven't learnt it, Miss Sue."

"You're the most aggravating boy that ever lived, I do believe," says Sue, sitting up in despair, "and it's very unkind of you to come here now. I don't believe it is really to see papa, it's only just because I don't want you here."

"It is *not*," retorts Val indignantly, "you seem to think that none of us care for papa but yourself, and you do all you can to keep us away from him, which is very unfair. But I know that half the time you worry him with complaints about all of us, and that can't be very cheerful for him."

"I *don't* worry him, Val," says Sue, trying to choke back her tears, "I never tell him anything that is not necessary. I would not trouble him for the world; he has trouble enough without that. How can you think such a thing of me?"

"Well, let us try to-morrow, and see if you don't make some complaint of nearly all of us. Don't cry, Sue, I don't want to be disagreeable, but this is a *fact*, and—"

"I'm sure if you don't want to be disagreeable, you behave in a strange way to show it," says Sue, almost

sobbing. "You only want me to stop crying because you think that when papa comes in he will be vexed about it, but I *sha'nt* stop, and he may see how unkind you are to me."

"Well, that is one way of not making complaints!" says Val contemptuously. "I thought you said just now that you would not trouble him for the world, and that he had trouble enough without that."

Val's words touch Sue in her tenderest point,—love for her father,—and in a moment she has dried her eyes, and answers,

"Well, I won't trouble papa about it, but I wish you would let me learn my French poetry now," and Sue tries to divert her mind and compose her face before her father comes in.

Presently they hear the chaise drive up, their father comes in, and Rachel follows with the supper.

"Well, Sue, and how has everything gone since I left you?" asks Dr. Rutherford. "Better, I hope."

"Yes, thank you, papa," answers Sue, bending over her bread and milk, for she knows that Val's quick eyes are fixed on her.

"That's right," says her father in a tone of relief; "and how have you got on, Val? Have you finished your imposition yet?"

"Very nearly, father."

"Hungry?" and the doctor holds out a huge slice of bread and butter to the ever-famished growing boy. "I did not know that I should find you here. I am very glad to see you."

"So am I to see you, father. I never see you except

on Sundays now. Mayn't I come in to supper every night?"

"Certainly, when I am not too late. I am very glad to have my children about me when I can."

And all this time Sue says nothing, though Val gives a triumphant nod at her, and she knows that her peaceful half-hour with her father, and the quiet waiting for him, is over.

"A quarter past nine," says Dr. Rutherford suddenly, "Val, it is your bed-time. You must not be late to-morrow, or you will get more impositions. Good-night, my boy."

"Good night, father."

His father is watching him, and as Sue lifts her head to kiss her brother, the doctor sees the red rims to her eyes, and asks, "Have you been crying, Sue?"

Sue's fair face turns crimson and she does not answer beyond rising to bid her father good night, but he keeps her hand and will not let it go.

"What is the matter, my daughter? Val, do you know what it is?"

"Yes, *I* made her cry," says Val bluntly; "I said she was always worrying you with complaints of us, and then she cried."

"Sit down, Val, I want to speak to you," says his father gravely, "and you, my Sue, sit here," and he points to a chair beside his own. "Now, Val, as you have yourself introduced the subject, I wish to tell you what I think. I do not expect as much from you as Sue does, because I am older and have had more experience of boys; besides, I remember what I was myself as a boy,

and how I used to tease Aunt Cosy ; but for all that, Val, I am sorry to find you have so little consideration for your sister. You will not see Rupert treat her as you do, when he comes home, and it is not only from Sue that I hear these complaints. Miss Griggs also tells me that you are rude and unkind to your sisters, and that you set the little boys such a bad example, which they are only too ready to follow. If you think this is manly, my boy, you are much mistaken. The bravest and manliest men have invariably been courteous and considerate towards women, and when you show yourself to be so rude and ungovernable to a lady or to your sisters, you are only behaving as a foolish and thoughtless boy."

Val makes no answer, for he does not know how to parry his father's remarks, and the doctor with a smile turns to Sue.

"It is quite true that my daughter expects too much goodness and wisdom from those younger than herself, but you cannot say that Sue is unkind to you, Val. If you want help, if you want a knife, scissors, a pencil, anything, in fact, I know Sue is the first to offer you hers, and therefore I must ask both of you to remember that as you can neither of you be faultless, you must make the best of each other, and try to soften any little unpleasantnesses that may occur. We have all lost so much," adds Dr. Rutherford, with a glance at his wife's picture hanging on the wall opposite, and speaking with a little quiver in his voice, "that we should make the most of the love and the dear ones that are left to us."

This appeal is not without effect. Val softens, and the tears come into his eyes, and are hastily dashed away

with a boyish shame, then he springs up and comes round to Sue's side, and gives her a hasty kiss.

"I'm very sorry—I'll try—I dare say I shall do it again, because I forget, but I sha'nt mean it, and I am really sorry;" and with this incoherent remark, Val rushes away.

"Good night, my Sue," says her father tenderly, "I wish I could be with you more, and look after you better, but if I did, my patients would call in some one else, and we should have to pack off to the workhouse."

Sue puts her arms round her father's neck and holds him very tight, while he murmurs, "God bless you!" and then she runs away.



CHAPTER III.

FOUR YEARS OLD.

EVE'S birthday dawns, clear, bright and cold, and Eve rises from her cot with pink cheeks and tumbled hair, and all the dignity of her four years. There is an air of deep responsibility about Eve, as if her four years weighed very heavily upon her, and she is unusually silent and subdued while nurse is dressing her.

Then she trots off to her father's room, and thumps away with her little fists upon his door.

"Fardy! Letten me in! I'se four! Letten me in, I'se four! Fardy! Fardy! Fardy! I'se *four!*"

"I'm very glad to hear it, my pet," calls the doctor, "but you must wait."

"I *tan't* wait," says Eve, "'iccle durls of four never waits, and I'se four!"

A laugh from within is the only answer.

Presently comes another small volley from the baby fists, and a cry—this time from a somewhat puckered up face, and piteous voice; "I'se *really* four! Letten me in, fardy."

And this time the door opens, and Eve trots in with great content.

The mysteries of her father's dressing have always a great charm for Eve, especially the shaving, the lather of soap-suds and the bright razors. It fascinates her chiefly because she does not understand it. So as her father shaves, Eve stands at his left elbow, chattering as fast as her little tongue can go.

She is evidently much impressed with her new dignity, and convinced in her own mind that four years of age is the acme of all wisdom. Her great desire is to find out how many more things she may do to-day, "betause I'se four !" than she might do yesterday, when she was "onie free," but unfortunately her father's answers do not come up to her expectations.

"I'se a big durl now," Eve announces with great satisfaction, "nursie says so. And I may play wif all sorts of fings now, thissors, and painths, and knives, and wazors !" and she makes a sudden grab at the dangerous, glittering razor, which her father has just laid down.

Fortunately he catches the tiny hand in time to save it. Eve's nose begins to wrinkle up rather ominously, but her father draws her towards him, and kisses her with a tender laugh.

"No, little curiosity ! even at the mature age of four, you must not meddle with such dangerously sharp things. You are like your namesake with the apple. It is very bright and pretty, my Eve, but it would cut your little hand all to pieces. Here, you may play with this," and the soft-hearted doctor supplies the child with the cut-glass stopper of a handsome toilet bottle on the table.

The cut glass has a very soothing effect, and Eve is once more happy, watching the wonderful colours, and asking where they come from. But at four years old it is not easy to understand about the prismatic colours, so Eve is at length content to call them rainbows, and enjoy, without attempting to understand.

Then Eve rides down to breakfast on her father's shoulder, and greets her brothers and sisters with a shout.

"Dood mornin' ! I'se four to-day."

Happy baby ! she is all unconscious of the bitter grief in her father's heart, the tears that *will* swim in Sue's blue eyes, and the cloud on Val's usually contented face. Floss is as prim as ever, but perhaps a trifle less self-satisfied, Paul is more dreamy, and Sydney rather oppressed by the general gloom. But Eve is quite unconscious, with the sweet, baby self-absorption of her four years, of which she is so proud. She pulls open (assisted by Sue) the little packets that lie on her breakfast plate, and laughs with joy as she finds sundry much-wished-for treasures.

Little trifles they are, some of very curious home manufacture, for the little Rutherfords have not much money to spend, but Eve likes them all, and can hardly be induced to let them lie on the table while she eats her bread and butter.

"Papa," says Sydney, "what are we to do to keep Eve's birthday?"

"I told Sue you were to ask Miss Griggs for a holiday, and have a cake for tea," answers the doctor, looking round the table at the faces before him ; "what more do you want, Syd?"

"A great deal more, papa," says Sydney, jumping up and down in his chair; "can't we go and have tea at old Betty's, and take the cake with us? Don't you remember how last year—?"

Sue and Val look at each other, and Sue rushes into the conversation, while Val, in a quiet way unknown to his sisters, reduces Sydney to crimson and indignant silence and submission.

"Oh! we don't want to go to old Betty's, father," says Sue, "we will wait until Rupert comes home, for she will be so glad to see him, you know."

Dr. Rutherford does not seem to hear, however, and only answers Sydney.

"Yes—I remember last year, Syd, but it is different to-day. I think you must be content to eat your cake at home."

Then he rises from the breakfast table, says that he has a great deal to do that day, and leaves them to Miss Griggs.

"He pinched my arm!" says Sydney, looking indignantly at Val; "he took hold of it at the elbow so, and it felt all *scrunch*!"

"Well, you should learn to hold your tongue," says Val with great decision, "come, shut up, Syd; it was all for your own good, you know."

Sydney does not see it quite in the same light, but he accepts Val's half coaxing tone as a sort of apology, and ceases to rub his injured elbow.

When Sue comes down with her music under her arm, she meets Val in the hall, and they both stop with the same feeling in their hearts.

"Oh dear! I wish we need never have these dreadful reminders of how happy we were last year!" says Sue with a sigh.

"Yes, and yet I shouldn't like to forget," says Val thoughtfully, "though one does not like to be reminded in that sort of way. I hope father—"

Val stops and colours, for the study door is open, and Dr. Rutherford stands before them.

"What do you hope about me, Val? or perhaps you would rather that I did not ask. Come into my study for a moment, both of you; you will have time before school, Val."

On the study table lie eight little packets, and on each packet is the name of one of Dr. Rutherford's eight children, from Rupert to baby Phyllis.

"In each of these packets," continues Dr. Rutherford, laying Sue's in her hand, "there is a little coloured picture of your mother. I hope you will often look at them, and endeavour to keep her memory fresh in your minds, that the thought of her may come to you in trouble or temptation, and be a help and comfort. Her influence over you need not cease with her life, it may even be stronger now than when she was with us, for when you do wrong, you cannot now ask her forgiveness, you cannot appeal to her to make peace among you, or listen to her loving reproof. Therefore shall we not—yes, Val, I, as well as you and Sue,—shall we not try to avoid those things which we know would have distressed and displeased her, and let us try to be happy and contented among ourselves, as she would have wished us to be? What do you say, Sue?"

Sue *says* nothing, only links her hand into her father's arm and leans against his shoulder.

"How awfully good of you, father!" says Val rather huskily; "sha'n't I take good care of this! and look at it too. I'm glad it's a locket, and it's so pretty—I—I—thank you *so* much, father," and Val gives his father a sudden hug and rushes away muttering something about "school time."

For a few moments Sue is silent, then she says,

"I think, papa, Val was hoping that you did not *very* much mind what was said at breakfast."

Dr. Rutherford does not instantly reply.

"I am afraid I have been very selfish in my sorrow," he answers at last, "and neglected the little ones because they could not sympathise with me, and their happy, unconscious faces made me feel the loss doubly for their sakes."

"Oh! father, no, you have been so good and patient!"

Her father smiles as he stoops and kisses her.

"Well! well! Tell Miss Griggs that as the children cannot go to old Betty's this afternoon, you are all to have games in the schoolroom, and I will come home as early as I can, and join you in your romps."

"Oh! father, *how* good of you!"

And Sue runs up with the joyful news.



CHAPTER IV.

LITTLE TRIALS.

IT has not yet been told how the Rutherfords lost the mother that they all loved so well.

She was a very good, kind lady, and often went to visit the poor in her little pony carriage, taking them such things as her husband told her they most wanted, soup, wine, or jellies, and she was beloved by them all.

One day, early in March, Mrs. Rutherford had gone out with Sue in the pony carriage, to visit a sick woman some miles off. On their way home, they met a horse and cart, with no man to guide it, and the horse was running away. There was an accident—Mrs. Rutherford's pony carriage was overturned, and Sue knew no more than that she had never seen her mother again.

Sue was stunned by a severe blow on her temple, and the first thing she remembered after the accident, was seeing her father's face as he bent over her, and hearing him murmur,

“The dearest!—and now the next! Must I lose both!”

But Sue had been spared to comfort her father, and she *is* a great comfort to him, and as she runs up to the schoolroom with her message of good news, he looks after her very proudly and fondly. But his patients must not be kept waiting, so he catches up his hat and gloves, and hurries out to the trap which is standing ready.

There is great joy in the schoolroom on hearing Sue's news, even Floss forgets to pull her longest curl and looks very glad. Paul's little placid face beams on Sue, and Syd is rampant. Miss Griggs, however, begins to shed tears.

She has not been accustomed to such levity in any of her former pupils. When the Honourable Matilda Straightlace lost her aunt, the dear child was inconsolable for months, and she had only seen her aunt five times in her life. Indeed, Miss Griggs's own feelings are too strong to allow of her taking part in any unseemly rioting,—do they not know the sad history of her life? and is it not very unfeeling—to say the least of it—to expect her to witness any rejoicings?

Sue's colour begins to rise, and a sharp answer comes to her lips, for Miss Griggs is very provoking, when Syd, who has been peeping into her hand, asks suddenly,

“Oh! Sue, what's that?”

Sue looks down and sees the simple gold locket with the tiny initials S. E. R. engraved on the case, (for Sue and Eve had divided their mother's name between them) and she is silent.

How soon—how very soon! is she forgetting all her father's words and her good resolutions. Sue's hand

closes tight round the locket, and to Syd's surprise she bends down and kisses him without answering.

This turns Miss Griggs's wrath into another channel, and Sue is glad to escape once more to her music, before she has said the words, which she fears she may be tempted to speak if she remains.

That afternoon, the *real* fun does not begin until Val comes home from school and introduces an element of romping, which Sue fancies herself too old, and Floss too proper to join. Sydney is ready to be as noisy and wild as possible, and Paul follows his younger brother's example, while Eve is Queen of the revels. Miss Griggs retires to her own room, unable to witness so much mirth and festivity, and Sue is left to keep order in her absence. A very gentle rule is Sue's this afternoon, and the children soon notice that she does not find fault with them as often as usual, and are consequently more attentive to her requests when she has to speak.

When Val comes in, however, all order ceases, for down goes Val on his hands and knees, and with terrible growls says that he is a wolf, and must eat any one he catches.

Paul and Sydney enjoy this game very much, and scamper about shouting and screaming with delight, but Eve's whole soul is filled with terror, and her shrieks are real as she flies to Sue for protection.

"Oh! Thue, don't let him tatch me. I don't *want* to be eated up! Don't let him tatch me, Thue!"

And safe in Sue's arms, she cuddles down and calls out with mock courage,

"You tan't tatch me now, Mithter Wolf. I'se twite thafe at home, fank you."

But when Val comes toward her, and offers to "huff and puff and blow her house in," like the wolf who ate up the tiny pigs, Eve calls out hastily,

"I fink, behaps, we'd better play at thumthin' elthe!"

Then comes tea, and Eve cuts her own cake with nurse's assistance, and Phyllis sits at the tea table for the first time, and insists upon sucking a silver spoon.

Then after tea, Dr. Rutherford comes home, and his entrance into the nursery is greeted with many shouts of joy, and Eve instantly takes possession of him as her own special property.

Blind man's buff, with "father" as blind man, is a most delightful game, and Floss is no longer allowed to sit over her wool-work, but made to join in the fun and run with the others. And so it happens that Floss is caught and made blind man in her turn. It is an opportunity for tormenting, not to be overlooked, and they all lead Floss a life, from the moment the bandage is over her eyes. Syd pulls her hair, Paul drags her frock out at the gathers, Val crawls about and is everywhere and no where, for she cannot catch him.

Eve has climbed on to her father's knee, and lies with shut eyes, pretending to be asleep, and Sue sits by his side with her work. She is making a white frock for Phyllis, and is not a little proud of the lovely stitching she puts into it.

But suddenly there is a cry from the four who are playing, and Val catches hold of Floss's arm and calls out, "That's not fair! You were cheating, Floss!"

Floss, hot and tired, ruffled both in temper and clothes,

is at length provoked beyond her usual calm, and she tears off the bandage and gives Val a smart blow on the side of his head. This makes Val angry, and in a moment he would have returned the blow with interest, but his father calls sharply,

"Val! are you going to strike a girl! For shame!" And the boy drops his hand.

"She has been cheating, father, and she struck me first!" says Val apologetically.

"That is no excuse. Floss being in the wrong does not therefore put you in the right. Floss, come here, and don't cry like that."

Floss, amid many tears, confesses that being very tired and unable to catch any one, she lifted the handkerchief "just a very little bit," and then she caught Val, only he was so horrid that she hit him.

"But Floss, the whole fun of the game is in not seeing whom you are to catch, so that it is spoilt if you break the rules."

"I don't care!" sobs Floss, "I didn't want to play, and I won't play with Val any more! He is a horrid, rough tease!"

"And you're a little prig!"

"Hush! children, I will have no squabbling. If it were not Eve's birthday, I should send you both to your rooms, but on consideration that it is a festive occasion, I will let you off this time. Now, my Eve, here comes nurse for a very sleepy little girl—half-an-hour later than her usual time! Floss, let me look at that sampler of yours, and you, Val, had better set to work on your lessons for to-morrow."

And so peace is restored, and Eve is carried off to bed, very unwilling to go.

Nurse has gone down to fetch her supper an hour later, and Sue is in her room, when she fancies she hears sobs, and runs at once to the nursery.

"Oh! oh! oh!" sounds from under Eve's bedclothes; "he's tumin' to eat me! He's tumin' to eat me! Oh! oh! oh!"

"Why, Eve!" says Sue, leaning over the crib and patting the frightened and excited child, "what is the matter, my pet?"

"Oh! Thue! don't let him do it," and two little hot hands are put up, and meet round Sue's neck. "You won't let him, Thue!"

"No, darling, Val wouldn't hurt you, it was only in play," says Sue, remembering the afternoon game, and feeling very sorry for the frightened baby.

"But the wolf!" sobs Eve in terror.

"There is no wolf, darling," answers Sue, tucking up the weary child, and administering many comforting pats, "you're quite safe, Eve, and papa is downstairs, and would not let anything hurt his little pet."

"Yeth!" assents Eve, much relieved.

"So now go to sleep, for here comes nurse." And Eve is comforted.

The children have all got their lockets except those who are too young to take care of them. Paul, who is a neat little fellow, and has many small possessions hidden away in a box under his bed, asks to be allowed to keep his, and Syd confides his locket to Paul's care.

Floss is very much pleased with hers, and finds a piece

of black ribbon on which to wear it, and Sue puts away Rupert's and the two little ones' lockets to keep them safe, until they are wanted.

If the truth were known, Valentine sheds a few bitter tears over his locket this night, when he thinks how shocked his mother would have been, if she had seen him so nearly striking Floss. But as Val says, "it is so difficult to remember *always*!"



CHAPTER V.

HUNGER TAMES A LION.

THE day after Eve's birthday, Sydney has either had too much cake the day before, or he has got out of bed on the wrong side, as nurse says, but for some reason, no one knows what, he is most outrageously naughty. Miss Griggs goes through every stage of astonishment to indignation, and after endeavouring for half the afternoon, to make him reasonable and learn his lessons, Sue gives up in despair, and Miss Griggs orders him to bed, with dry bread and water for his tea.

Sydney marches off to his room with a very independent air, and nurse, in stern silence, puts him to bed.

When Dr. Rutherford comes home at tea time, he thinks that perhaps if he spoke to the little rebel, it might bring him to a sense of guilt, and so he goes up with Sue, who, with a very stern expression, is bringing Sydney his unsatisfactory meal.

"I am very sorry to find you in disgrace, Syd," says his father, unable to resist kissing the round rosy face

that looks up rather piteously from the crib. "How is it that you are again naughty?"

"I don't know," answers Sydney, his eyes wandering round the room, and finally resting on Sue and her tray. "Oh! is it there?"

"This is your—I can't call it *tea*, Syd, I wish I could," and Sue sets it down before him, and the child looks at it eagerly.

"But *where* is it?" he asks again.

"Where is what, Syd?" inquires his father.

"The dry water. Miss Griggs said I was to have *dry bread and water*. Where's the dry water?"

There is no withstanding the absurdity of this remark and Sydney's grave, puzzled face. Dr. Rutherford tries in vain to look serious, breaks into a laugh in which he is joined by Sue, and they are forced to retreat lest Sydney's punishment should not produce the desired effect.

"Sue," says her father, as they sit together that evening; "I have had a letter from Aunt Cosy to-day."

"Yes! papa. How is Uncle Jeff?"

"He is rather better, and I have good news for you, Sue; Aunt Cosy is coming to spend the Christmas holidays here, because Uncle Jeff is going to the South of France with some friends, and it is hoped that he may get stronger there."

"Do you think he will, papa?" asks Sue.

"No, dear, I am afraid not. But some kind friends have offered to take him, and Aunt Cosy will give up her house and come here for a time. You will all like that."

But Sue does not answer for a moment, then as her father looks up, she says hastily,

"Oh! yes, I suppose so."

"What do you mean by that, Susy?" asks her father, leaning forward so as to get a better view of her face; "what is the difficulty, my child?"

"There is no difficulty, father; it's only—only that I feel so horrid—I am ashamed to tell you."

"Never mind, I promise not to be too shocked, what is this horrid feeling? Can't you tell me?"

"It's only—only that I like to have Rupert all to myself in the holidays, and he's such a pet of Aunt Cosy's, and he is so fond of her—I—I sha'n't see *half* enough of him!"

"It is always a difficult matter not to be jealous of those we love, Sue, and it is a lesson that had better be learnt early. Rupert does not love you less, because he is also fond of Aunt Cosy, and you must remember that the older Rupert grows, the more likely he will be to form other friendships and choose other companions. It seems hard at first, but you will also form other friendships, and as long as you and Rupert love each other with the real *home-love*, of which your mother set you both such a wonderful example, you will not suffer in his estimation."

"And then I shall never be alone with you, papa!"

"Yes, you will, Sue, quite as often as is good for you. You and I have got into bad habits—selfish habits—of preferring to be alone together, and Aunt Cosy's visit will do us both good, at least I hope so. Come, my child, learn to look on the bright side of things, and not always on the dark side. Besides, you should think of Aunt Cosy's trouble, and what a convenience to her it is

that she is able to come and spend some time here. Uncle Jeff's illness has made them very poor."

"Yes, I know," says Sue hastily, "I ought to have remembered that. Poor Aunt Cosy! she is always so kind and good! When is she coming?"

"Not until after Christmas. I think she will be here for the New Year, but I am not quite sure about it. It is a very sad parting for her and Uncle Jeff."

Sue's heart is very tender, so she tries to make the best of it, and feel glad that Aunt Cosy has such a home to come to, while she has none of her own, but there is still a little shadow on her face as she says good-night to her father.

Dr. Rutherford leans his head on his hands for a few minutes after she has left him, and remains in deep thought, when to his surprise, the door softly opens, and a little white ghost walks in—barefooted.

"Papa, dear," says the little ghost, "I'm sorry I was so naughty, and I've come to tell you I never mean to be naughty again!"

"My dear Syd! The idea of your coming down at this hour! and with those bare feet too!" and the doctor picks up the boy and carries him to the fire, after wrapping him up in Sue's shawl, which has been left (untidy girl!) on a chair in the hall.

Syd nestles down in his father's arms, and spreads out his toes to the comfortable blaze.

"Paul says," remarks Syd, quoting the only authority he owns, "Paul says that it's very *wicked* to go to sleep before you've said you're sorry, after being naughty. Is it? And I asked him what I should have to do if you

were away, and I was naughty then. Should I have to keep awake till you came back, or else be *wicked*?"

"No, I think that would be much too hard work for a little boy of your age, Syd. I do not expect or wish you to do anything of the kind. It is enough for me if you feel sorry in your *heart*, and I shall be content if you wait till the next convenient opportunity for telling me so. I would rather you did that, than that you caught cold coming out of bed to tell me."

Syd yawns and wriggles down into his father's arms, as if, on the whole, the risk was worth running.

"Don't you think you are warm enough to go back to bed now, Syd, as you have confessed and are forgiven?" asks Dr. Rutherford, yet feeling that as this child of his does not often find such an opportunity of sitting on his father's knee, he does not therefore wish to cut the joy too short.

Syd looks up and blinks his eye vigorously for a minute, then he says,

"Papa, I don't think it's any use my going to bed—*ever*—because I don't go to sleep. I lie awake, papa, and I can't get to sleep because I'm so full of thinks. And I can't think and go to sleep too, can I?"

"Are you full of 'thinks' to-night?" asks his father laughing.

"Yes—dreadfully full—and so's Paul, only he doesn't mind it, and I do. I feel all light here—like a bubble, papa, and I seem to float in bed."

Dr. Rutherford leans forward in his chair, and touches the bell by the fireplace, and in a moment Rachel comes.

"I want a good basin of bread and milk, please,

Rachel," says the doctor, "with plenty of crust in it: the sort of stuff you would make for a very hungry little boy."

Rachel smiles and goes away, and Syd looks up into his father's face and laughs outright.

"Who's that for?" he asks.

"I think it must be for a little boy who had no tea," says Dr. Rutherford, "only I hope the little boy will not forget that he was very naughty and deserved his punishment most thoroughly."

"Oh! no, I won't, indeed I won't!" says Syd eagerly, thinking more of the bread and milk than of his own sins. "I'll be very good to-morrow, and—do you think she'll put *much* crust in it, papa?"

Dr. Rutherford is prevented from answering by the door opening and a *second* little white ghost appearing, asking with chattering teeth,

"Is Syd here, papa?"

"Yes, my boy. Oh! Paul! Paul! I shall have you both in bed with colds to-morrow! Come here, and share my knee and Syd's shawl. What will nurse say to us, when she finds us here?"

"I know," answers Paul, "she'll say, 'Just like the doctor!' and then she'll laugh."

"But she won't laugh to-morrow, Paul, when she has to come to me for ipecacuanha and squills, and you are wheezing, and coughing, and giving her a great deal of trouble. Ah! Rachel, that is capital!" he adds, as the servant brings in a smoking basin of bread and milk, nearly all crust. "Thank you, we will have it here, and when you go up, will you ask nurse to bring down something

to put round Master Paul? Come, boys, you *must* share."

Sydney is very willing to give half his bread and milk to Paul, only as the latter has had a more substantial tea than Syd, it is arranged between them that Paul shall have one mouthful to Syd's two, and so they eat it together very happily.

Just as Sydney has finished the last mouthful, nurse comes in with a blanket, which she at once wraps round Paul, and he is carried up to bed, Sydney following in his father's arms. Dr. Rutherford waits until both the little boys are in bed, then he goes up to Sydney's crib and leans over him, asking, with a laugh,

"You don't feel as if you were floating *now*, do you?"

"Oh! no, papa, I feel quite *thick through* and very heavy. I sha'nt float about to-night."

"I hope not. Now, go to sleep, both of you. Good night, Paul, and don't let me hear that you have caught cold to-morrow."

And so Dr. Rutherford leaves them.

The last thing the boys hear is nurse's exclamation,

"Just like the doctor!" and in five minutes they are as sound asleep as two tops.



CHAPTER VI.

THE ELDEST SON OF THE HOUSE.

THE next excitement in the family is caused by Rupert's return from Winchester. He arrives in the evening, and of course Sue is the first to welcome him.

"Oh ! Rupert, how nice it is to have you home again !" she says, hovering round him, "it seems *really* like the Christmas holidays now. Papa was sorry he had to go out, but he will not be long. Oh ! how you have grown, Rupert."

Sue may well say that. She is tall for her age, but her brother is a whole head taller, and looks down at her with a kind, superior, and elder-brotherly smile.

"Yes, I suppose I have grown, but so have you, Sukey. And how is father, and the others ?"

"Father's too good and sweet, and oh ! *so* patient, Rupert. And the others are all right. Val's out ; he was asked to spend the evening with a schoolfellow, but he won't be late. You'll see the babies to-morrow. Floss is with Miss Griggs in the schoolroom."

"Oh! I'll go and have a look at them before father comes," and away goes Rupert, three steps at a time, and he flings open the schoolroom door with a crash.

Sue follows, and is glad to find that Floss looks very delighted when Rupert appears, though Miss Griggs sighs over him, and hopes he is not outgrowing his strength.

There is so much to say, and so much to show, and so much to explain, that no one hears Dr. Rutherford return, until he is in the schoolroom, and lays his hands on his son's shoulders. And then Rupert turns round quickly, catches at his father's hands, and says in an odd sort of voice,

"I never heard you come, or I should have been down to meet you. How are you, father?"

"Too busy to be anything but well," answers the doctor, "and how are you, Rupert? Bless the boy! How he's grown. Sue, come here and stand beside him. Why, you're nowhere, and we thought you a fair height this morning. But are you ready for supper, Rupert? If not, you had better be off, for the bell will ring in a minute."

Away goes Rupert, and Sue flies off to brush her hair, and smiles at the radiant face that looks at her from the glass.

And then they all meet in the dining-room.

Rupert has much to tell his father, and he sits at his left hand to-night, and Sue opposite him. Rupert tells what he has been doing since he went back, what the masters have said to him, what his place is, and what a capital fellow Justin Meadows is—and *is* father going to

get him a gun? because Justin has promised him some capital rabbit shooting, and he is longing to try his hand at it. There is also a wood where there are plenty of pigeon felts, and Meadows has promised to let him come with him and Jacob, the old keeper, and learn to shoot, if he may only have a gun!

"Well, I'll see," answers his father, while Sue curls up her little nose, and says with some disgust,

"I can't see what fun people can get out of those horrid guns! The noise is enough! and then it's so horrid to kill things."

"Don't you know, Sue," says her father laughing, "that it has been said of the English, that an Englishman is never happy unless he is killing something? It sounds very dreadful, but I am afraid that in some cases it is only too true. I hope Rupert will never become such a lover of 'sport,' that he will be able to let nothing live."

"Oh! no, father, if I may have a gun for the rabbits and the pigeon felts—why, Sue, I wonder you ever eat mutton or beef, and as to a fowl, or a pigeon pie—it ought to be quite against your principles."

From any of the others, Sue would angrily resent this speech, but Rupert is privileged, and though she colours, she makes no answer. She is, however, not best pleased when her father says he will lend Rupert his gun, if he promises to be very careful of it, which promise of course the boy gives with much readiness.

When Val comes home, he shakes hands with Rupert, and seems rather disgusted, on finding how much taller his brother has grown. Then he has to hear all the news over again, until at last Dr. Rutherford declares that all

the younger ones must go to bed, for he wants to talk to Rupert.

So Sue, Val, and Floss have to say good-night, and Sue goes rather sadly up to her room. She has wanted so much to have a good talk with Rupert herself, but he has not seemed to care about it, and there has been no opportunity for her to say anything to him.

And so Sue goes rather discontentedly to bed. Later in the night, she hears her father open Rupert's door—his room is next Sue's—and say very decidedly,

"You must put out your light, Rupert; I can't have this sort of thing."

Then comes a muffled answer which she cannot hear.

"I can't help that," replies Dr. Rutherford, "we must attend to rules here, and one of my strictest rules is, that as soon as you are in bed, you must put out the candle. Come, out with it."

Then a good-night is exchanged on both sides, the door closes and in the silence that follows, Sue goes to sleep.

Rupert spends the next day in cleaning and examining his father's gun, and if Sue did not sit by his side, in spite of the unpleasant smell of oil and dirty gun-rags, she would see little of her brother. Val's school term having come to an end the day before, he is able to dance attendance on Rupert, and act "fag" for the occasion, for the gun is a matter of deep interest to him also.

In the afternoon, however, Rupert announces that he "must just run over for a few minutes to speak to Justin Meadows," and Sue silently watches him depart.

"Why should he want to see *Justin Meadows*?" she

thinks bitterly, as she turns back to her work, "he only parted from him the day before—has seen him every day during the term, and he has not seen his sister for a long time, yet he seems quite content to leave her, though they have not had ten minutes' quiet talk by themselves. It is *very* hard!" and Sue sits by the fire stitching at Phyllis's frock, and looking very cross.

Val is at the table, looking at Rupert's new book about firearms in general, his elbows on the table, and his head resting between his hands. Sue looks at him—he does not look cross, and so Sue feels a sudden desire to impart her grievance to him.

"Val," she says, and he looks up.

"Hullo!" he answers.

"I wish Rupert had not made such a tremendous friend of Justin Meadows."

"Oh! do you? why?" asks Val surprised.

"Because he will be going off at all hours, and *we* shall see nothing of him."

Val laughs unfeelingly.

"You'll see quite enough of Rupert before his holidays are over, I dare say."

"No, I shall *not*!" says Sue indignantly, "besides Aunt Cosy is coming after Christmas—and you know what Aunt Cosy is!"

"I know she's the jolliest aunt any one ever had!" says Val loyally.

"Oh! but she won't be jolly now—not one bit! Uncle Jeff is very bad and has to go away to France, and Aunt Cosy 'll be as sad as possible—and just as we were all getting a little happier!" And two big tears

drop on Phyllis's frock. Val looks at his sister, and sees the drops. Somehow, at that moment, it occurs to him that Sue does not care much for *his* companionship, and he begins to feel a little lonely—much as Sue is feeling, but he does not say so.

"I've been looking forward to these holidays so much!" says Sue with a sob, "and now it's all going to be horrid—I know it is. Rupert will be away all day—and there's no one else to speak to!"

Val's foot begins to swing under the table, but he is silent.

"If Floss were older, or even a little different, it would be *something*," grumbles Sue, "but there isn't any one," and then Sue looks up and meets Val's eyes, and he laughs.

"I don't count, it seems," he says, "but I'm very sorry for you, Sue, though I don't see how it can be helped. Suppose we try to make the best of each other, and see how that will answer. What do you say?"

"Oh! I should like that," says Sue more gently, "but you see, Val—it's—it's—it's not *quite* the same thing."

"Of course it isn't—no one said it was. I know that it makes a great difference, my being two years younger than you are, and Rupert a year older, but still, as we can't help it, let's try to make the best of it—shall we?"

"Oh! yes, we will," answers Sue brightening, "but *how*, Val?"

"Well, let me see. You're working—shall I read to you—something about these guns—guns are very interesting, you know."

"Oh dear! I'm afraid I don't care about them," says Sue ruefully. "Can't you find anything else?"

"Here's Old Saint Paul's," suggests Val.

"Oh! that's so ghastly. Is there nothing else?"

"There's 'Windsor Castle,' and 'The Tower of London.'"

"Oh! no, those are dreadful!"

"They're awfully jolly, I can tell you," says Val with a longing look towards his favourites; "but I'll read something else if you like. There's 'Gulliver's Travels,' would you like that?"

"Oh! no—I always thought that such a stupid book!"

"*Stupid!* Well, there's 'Robinson Crusoe,' and the 'Swiss Family Robinson,' and that tiresome 'Masterman Ready,' and 'Westward Ho!'"

"Oh! yes, read *that*," says Sue, "only read all about Amyas, and not a word about Frank, because I can't bear that part!"

And so Val begins to read.

How quickly the short afternoon passes now! Sue can hardly believe it when Rachel brings in the tea-things, and begins to light the lamps. Then Sue runs away to smooth her hair before tea, and when she returns the lamps are lighted and Rupert is standing in the hall, showing a dead bird to Val.

"Look here, Sue," he exclaims, holding it out, "I shot it—I shot it myself with Justin's gun. I'll have it stuffed as my first shot! Look! Isn't he a beauty?"

"What is it?" asks Sue with some disgust, for she does not like dead things, "it looks like—oh! *Rupert*, it is a thrush! a song thrush, and you were wicked enough to shoot it! How could you be so horrible, and how could that Meadows boy let you? only I dare say he is as

horrid and cruel as you will become, if you—" but here Sue is stopped by her own choking, indignant tears, and a shout of laughter from the boys.

"Here, Justin, come and defend yourself," calls Rupert, and the next moment, to Sue's horror, "*that Meadows boy*" comes forward from behind an alcove, where he had been examining Dr. Rutherford's gun.

Justin Meadows does not look horrid or cruel. He is six months older than Rupert, and about the same height, but very slight and almost delicate looking. His curly brown hair is falling about his forehead in very becoming disorder, his blue eyes twinkle a little mischievously, as he looks at Sue, but his lips are grave as he says,

"I'm very sorry, but I didn't know it was a song thrush. It was getting a little dark and I could not see. It was quite my fault, not Rupert's. I told him to fire, and he did, and I think it was only a fluke his hitting it. I am very sorry you think so badly of me."



CHAPTER VII.

AN INVITATION.

SUE is too much aghast to make any proper answer to Justin's apology, she can only falter, "I beg your pardon! I did not know you were there."

"Is that a reason for abusing me?" laughs Justin, "but I promise that we will kill no more singing birds if possible; only please don't look in that corner, because you may be still more shocked."

"I can't see the *use* of killing things," says Sue, trying to recover her usual spirit, "and as for the *pleasure*—that is quite beyond me!" and she walks off into the dining-room to make the tea.

The next moment, Dr. Rutherford comes in, and she can hear Val and Rupert telling him, amid much laughter, the dreadful things she has said about Justin Meadows, and Sue turns crimson with shame and anger.

When they come in to tea, she is ready for them, only she is most indignant to find that "*that* Meadows boy" takes a place beside her, and begins to talk as if nothing

had happened. He avoids the subject of "sport," and talks to her of such things as interest him, feeling sure that Rupert's sister must be interested also. Cricket, football, lawn tennis, are all discussed, and before tea is over, Sue thinks that Justin Meadows seems a very nice fellow—only, with a slight shudder, she remembers the little grey pile in the hall, which he had warned her not to examine.

"It is all very well for *you*," says Sue pensively, "but it is so different with girls. Boys may run, and jump, and climb to their heart's content, but girls must only sit still and look nice, and that is what I dislike so much. I like the summer holidays well enough, because the birds sing, and I can sit under the trees and read a book, but there is nothing to do in the winter, and now Rupert of course will be going out for his shooting and such things. Oh! I don't like winter!"

"Don't you? I do—if it is a real, good, downright winter, with plenty of frost and snow," says Justin with brightening eyes; "and that is what I hope we are going to have."

"Oh! but think how the poor suffer!" says Sue, who knows well enough the poverty-stricken look of a cottage at the end of a six weeks' frost; "I always feel as if we ought not to wish for a hard winter, because it is so dreadful for them."

"But a wet winter is almost as bad, and a great deal more unhealthy—ask your father," says Justin; "no, I don't think it is wrong to wish for a healthy winter, with a fair share of frost and snow, when everything looks bright and jolly, instead of dirty and disagreeable. I am

one of those lucky fellows whose birthdays come in the holidays, and I always have some fun then. I was born on the 6th of January."

"Oh! how nice, on Twelfth Day. Then you have a birthday coming. Eve—the youngest but one of the children—was four the other day. Oh! father," she exclaims, suddenly turning to him, "I must tell you what Eve did this morning. She had got hold of something, I don't know what it was, but she carried it very carefully and dug a hole in the garden and buried it there. I saw her doing it, and asked what it was, you'll never guess what she answered! She nodded her head very gravely, and said, 'I've been planting the seed of a Christmas tree, so that when it grows up, we shall have it.' I hadn't the heart to tell her it was no good, she seemed so much in earnest about it."

They all laugh at Eve's idea, but Justin says quickly,

"I wish you would let her come to my birthday party, Dr. Rutherford, and I promise to let her have a delightful Christmas tree. Mother has said that I may have just what I like that evening, and I was thinking what fun it would be to have a real, big, children's party."

Dr. Rutherford shakes his head, though he laughs.

"My dear boy, big parties for little children are the greatest mistake in the world. They eat too much, are over-excited, become cross, tired, envious, and disappointed. They are certain to fix their affections on a particular toy, which is equally certain to fall into the hands of their neighbour, who, in their turn, would have preferred something else. A Christmas tree is a very pretty thing, and happy children are always a pretty sight,

but as a doctor, I can answer for it that children's parties are a mistake, as far as the children are concerned."

"Oh! father!" and "Oh! papa!" is exclaimed on all sides.

"Yes, I am sorry to say that experience has taught me the bitter truth," continues Dr. Rutherford, laughing; "a child's party one week, generally means the doctor the next. No, Justin, I won't let you corrupt my little Eve."

"Well, but, Dr. Rutherford, do you object to a *little* party—small and early—with a dozen or twenty children? Might not even your little Eve be allowed to come to that?"

"Yes, on conditions."

"Conditions! Certainly. What are they?"

"Nothing stronger than weak tea, nothing richer than sponge cake, nothing deadlier than barley-sugar. If you agree to that, I have no further objection to make, and would even come to the party myself."

"Oh! but will you?" begs Justin, "that would be such capital fun, and we would have the Christmas tree just the same. Will you let them come, and come yourself, Dr. Rutherford?"

"*Them!* You don't know what you are asking, Justin. Eve is the youngest of seven, and there is yet another. Eve and I will come, if you like."

But there is an outcry at once.

"Oh! father! how greedy, only you and Eve to a Christmas tree!" exclaims Sue laughing.

"But I mean it," says Justin, looking into Dr. Rutherford's eyes with his steady, honest blue ones; "I want them all to come—all seven, and you to make the num-

ber even, please. And we'll all drink weak tea, and eat the sponge cake, and the barley-sugar, and it *shall* be a capital party if I can make it one. I have all sorts of splendid ideas, and you must help me, Rupert."

"Well," says Rupert slowly, "of course I'll help you as much as I can, only when you could have a *real* party, it seems to me very odd that you should think of having a parcel of children."

"Because I like the children, and I like to see them happy. I shall enjoy giving Miss Eve her first Christmas tree, and there are some other tinies that I shall get mother to ask."

"Oh! of course if you do it like that, it's very good of you," replies Rupert; "only I am afraid that I should not be so unselfish."

"I am not unselfish," says Justin shortly, "it is what I *like*. There is no unselfishness in that, I suppose."

"There may be some," remarks Dr. Rutherford with a kindly smile, "the habit of giving up to others may, in time, become a pleasure. But I shall not consider it an engagement until I have received an invitation from your mother, Justin."

"Very well, sir. It will come."

"Now mind, no one is to mention this to any of the little ones, in case it should not come off."

They all promise, and tea being over, the party breaks up, and Justin goes away.



CHAPTER VIII.

RUPERT AND SUE.

"SUE, what did you eat for dinner?" asks Rupert.
"What did I eat for dinner?" she echoes in astonishment, "What a very odd question. Rabbit pie."

"Oh! and do you like rabbit pie?"

"Yes, very much. What makes you ask such funny questions?"

"Justin told me to. He wanted to know if you ate any of the rabbits he shot."

For a moment Sue looks dreadfully horrified, a little as if she had been accused of being a cannibal, then she answers hastily,

"If one remembered such things about everything that comes to dinner—what should we eat, I should like to know? Of course it seems very dreadful, and if I had thought of it, I dare say I should not have eaten rabbit, only I forgot all about it."

"Well, you mustn't mind if Justin laughs about it. He was highly amused with you, Sue, and calls himself

Justin Meadows boy.' I imagine he has a dull time of it at home, being the only one, and then his father is such an invalid and cannot walk. Justin is a very nice fellow, only an awful tease, when he knows you well enough."

"Oh! I sha'nt mind him," says Sue, with a little toss of her head; "I dare say he is no worse than you and Val."

"Ah! wait till you see," answers Rupert mysteriously.

Justin is as good as his word about the invitation, for before night, Dr. Rutherford receives the most elaborate invitation ever penned.

"Mrs. Meadows requests the pleasure of

Dr. Rutherford's,

Mr. Rupert Rutherford's,

Miss Rutherford's,

Mr. Valentine Rutherford's,

Miss Florence Rutherford's,

Mr. Paul Rutherford's,

Mr. Sydney Rutherford's,

and Miss Eve Rutherford's company on the 6th of January, at 3 o'clock, p.m., on the auspicious occasion of her son Mr. Justin Meadows' eighteenth birthday. R. S. V. P."

The writing is unmistakably Justin's, and the postscript, on the other side, makes them all laugh.

"Don't let the children come in starched frocks, please. If I were King of England, I would forbid the use of starch in the Royal Laundries. Yours, J. M."

"How nice his collars, and cuffs, and shirt fronts would look!" laughs Rupert, "he forgets that. But you will answer this, father, and let me take the letter—won't you?" and Dr. Rutherford assents.

The next day is Christmas Eve, and the children are all very mysterious in their preparations for Christmas Day.

Very simple preparations they are, little presents worked by loving hands. Sue's are of course, the prettiest and most useful. A knitted crimson woollen cap for Rupert, a new bag for his school books for Val, with his initials embroidered on it in gold-coloured silk; a lace collar for Floss, worked with delicate braid and web-like stitches, a couple of balls for Paul and Sydney, a knitted jacket for Eve, and the white frock for Phyllis.

Then there is also her greatest triumph, a netted silk purse for her father, which has cost her many a half-hour of secret work, and is at last really finished with tassels and rings to keep in the money.

But to-day Sue is thinking. She has finished all her presents, the frock is neatly folded up in her drawer, and she has looked through the array with some pride, for she has never been able to manage such nice presents before.

Just then Rupert's voice is heard, and Sue hastily shuts the drawer and answers his knock with "Come in."

"Look here, I'm off to see Justin, and take father's letter. Perhaps I shall get him to come back with me, father said I might. What are you doing? Presents?"

"Yes," and Sue opens the drawer cautiously, giving the red cap a little push, which sends it out of view, and lets her brother peep in.

"Is that white frock for me?" asks Rupert, laughing "or the jacket, or one of those balls? I say, Sue, you have done a lot of work for us all this year. What have you done for yourself, eh?"

"Oh! plenty of things, more than I could tell you. I have done all my own mending, and you know mamma used to say that the great test of a lady's work is, how she mends her own things."

"Well—I'm off. Would you like to have a peep into my room first, Sue? 'just one little peep,' as Eve says."

"Oh! yes," says Sue gladly, for this is the first time Rupert has sought her of his own accord, and she feels she must make the most of it.

"Come on, then," and Rupert leads the way.

Such an untidy room it is! Boots in all directions, a jacket lying on the bed, gun-rags in one corner, a bag of cartridges in another, the gun itself leaning against the dressing table. A young ferret (a recent present from Jacob, the Park House gamekeeper) is in a cage near the window, and in the middle of the room, a lawn tennis racquet and a box of balls with the lid off and the balls scattered about the room. Over the mantelpiece hang a bow and a quiver of arrows, a spear from some savage nation, a couple of ancient horse-pistols and an old broken sword. On the chest of drawers repose a cricket bat and a huge, leather-covered football, also a splendid model ship, now used as a receptacle for all odds and ends of litter in the room. Rupert marches in, nothing dismayed, and drags a box out from under the dressing table, but Sue pauses to look round the room.

"Did you bring Justin Meadows up here the other day?" she asks after a moment.

"Yes, why not?"

"And was it as—as *tidy* as it is now?"

"Oh *dear*, no! Rachel has been putting ever so many

things by, and I don't know where half of them ~~are~~ yet. Why? what's the matter? The room is all right, isn't it?"

"It's *awful*, Rupert!" says Sue, suddenly breaking into a peal of laughter; "I don't believe you know what a tidy room looks like."

"Oh! yes, I know, all bare and horrid. Now I like a room to look as if some one lived in it, and used it and kept their things in it."

"Well, certainly no one would ever think you kept your room for ornament and not for use, Rupert, dear. I never saw anything so untidy! Why, papa's room, when he is in the most desperate hurry, is nothing to this dreadful litter."

"Litter! nonsense! There is nothing here that I don't want and use. *Litter*, indeed!" and Rupert begins to push the box away without giving Sue the peep he has promised.

But Sue goes to his side, and putting her arms round his neck, kisses him.

"Don't be angry with me, Rupert," she says very sweetly; "I did not mean to find fault, only your idea of tidiness is *so* comical!"

Rupert laughs, smooths the frown from his brow, and draws out the box once more.

"Now, only a little peep!" he says, and lifts the lid. There are two or three books, a top, a wooden horse, a ball with a ring for Phyllis to bite, a packet of sugar-plums for Eve, and apart from the others, *something*, done up in silver paper.

"Yes, that's *it*," says Rupert, as Sue glances at it and

colours; "wouldn't you like to know what it is? I know you'll like it, Sukey, and will value it too."

"Oh dear! what can it be? Let me feel it!"

"Not a feel! You'd guess at once. Come away!"

Rupert shuts the box with a bang and pushes it away again, and they both go down together.

"Well, good-bye for the present, Sue," says Rupert, as he flings his gun over his shoulder ready to depart; "take care of yourself, and I'll try not to become as 'horrid and cruel as *that* Meadows boy!'"

Sue flies at him, and pretends to box his ears, and the next moment they have parted, breathless and laughing, and Rupert goes on his way.



CHAPTER IX.

NARROW ESCAPES.

RUPERT finds Justin in his father's study, full of plans for the party and Christmas tree.

Mr. Meadows, in his chair with the great wheels, is listening with an amused face to his son's account of Sue's unexpected attack on him, and Mrs. Meadows is working near the fire.

Everything in the house and in the room shows the good taste and wealth of its owners, and Rupert suddenly begins to envy his friend all the pretty and amusing things that belong to him.

Justin is at his father's elbow, mending with a pair of pliers a toy steam engine which has come to grief, while Mr. Meadows makes suggestions for its improvement.

Rupert shakes hands with Mr. and Mrs. Meadows, but Justin merely looks up with a bright welcoming smile, and shows his hands which are covered with oil.

"Have you brought your gun, Rupert? That is right. Jacob is going to take us to Shotover Wood this morning,

and I feel a sort of thrill all over me. Think of shooting *real* pheasants and partridges. *Vive le sport !*"

"It's just as well that Sue doesn't hear you say so," laughs Rupert.

And Justin says quickly, "Oh ! about the rabbits? Did you ask her?"

"Yes, she ate rabbit pie and liked it. You should have seen her face when I said you had shot them."

Justin laughs.

"Well, I suppose girls are like that, and of course it is very tenderhearted and sentimental, but they eat fish and game just as much as any one else who has not such strong opinions on the subject. There, father, I think that will work well now. Are you going to take it back to Ted? Then please tell him, if the cog bends again, to let me have it back, and I will see if I can't get a stronger one somehow. It is a capitally made toy."

"And isn't that like him?" says Rupert, "always working for children, and messing about with their toys while the pheasants are waiting to be shot."

"It's done, it's done," exclaims Justin, springing up, "I sha'nt keep you a minute now, so don't say any more about it. By the by, has Dr. Rutherford sent any answer to my invitation?"

"Yes, I forgot it, here it is," and Rupert brings a rather crumpled letter out of his pocket.

"No, I can't touch it. Will you read it, mother, while I get this oil off my fingers, and send word to Jacob?"

The letter proves to be a most satisfactory acceptance of the invitation, and the doctor promises no starched frocks. Then the boys meet in the hall, and go off under

Jacob's guidance to Shotover Wood. Near luncheon time, Sue begins to wonder why the boys do not come, when the hall door bursts open and in they rush, breathless, excited, both talking at once, and a very fair bag of game, shot (all but one) by Justin.

Sue comes into the hall and tries not to look disgusted, as one by one the pretty brown birds are turned out of the bag, and Justin sees her lift up a pretty, limp head, and softly touch the feathers, with a pitying, caressing movement.

"Yes, I know," he says, in answer to her mute look of reproach, "but they are not singing birds, and we did not lose one wounded one that I know of. But you will forgive me, I hope, when you see them at dinner, nicely roasted, with bread sauce and gravy, and condescend to treat them—as you did the rabbits!"

Sue colours; she does not ever like to be laughed at, but as she looks up, Justin's eyes disarm all that his tongue has said to offend her, and she smiles in spite of herself.

"Yes, I forgot, and I ate them," she answers frankly. "I dare say it seems silly to you that I would not have done so had I been reminded at the time, but I can't help that."

Then Rupert calls impatiently to Justin, and he goes.

"Did you take that cartridge out of your gun, before you came in?" asks Justin, as he and Rupert scramble through their toilet.

"Yes, I think so. It will be all right, never fear, and I'll look directly I go down."

Justin is ready first, and he goes down into the hall,

and to the alcove where the guns are standing, and there finds Sydney with Rupert's gun in his small hands.

Before Justin has time to speak, Sydney has seen him and got into a fright, he becomes hopelessly entangled in the gun, and with a report that terrifies the whole household, it goes off. When Justin, who has been half blinded by the flash, recovers his presence of mind, he sees Sydney and the gun lying on the floor, and Sue standing in a doorway, exactly where the muzzle pointed. In an agony of fear Justin picks up Sydney, and finds he is more frightened than hurt, having been knocked down only by the recoil. But Sue stands still in the doorway, very pale, and holding her hand over her right ear.

"Are you hurt?" cries Justin, springing to her side.

"Are you?" she asks.

"Not a bit; it was not pointed at me. But you, your hand is covered with blood. Let me look, you *must* let me look," and he draws the hand down from her ear.

Very great is his relief when he sees it. The ear is bleeding, but there is nothing more serious than a graze from one of the shot which are imbedded in the door, just beyond where Sue's head was resting at the moment the gun went off.

By this time Rupert has joined the party, and finds Sue crying hysterically from the shock and fright, Justin very white, but still able to give a lucid account of what has happened, and Sydney far more concerned that the gun knocked him down than at Sue's narrow escape. Rachel is also there, and Miss Griggs comes trembling to know whether there are thieves in the house. And while they are all in a state of confusion, Dr. Rutherford

comes in. He looks very grave as he hears the story from Rupert, and orders Sydney to the nursery for immediate punishment, while he leads Sue into the library and shuts the door.

Sue sits sobbing in her chair, feeling a very comfortable victimised sensation, a sharp tingling in her ear, and something in her throat which makes her feel that she *must* cry. A little cold water and a scrap of plaster so make the wound (which is not much larger than a pin head) more comfortable, and then Dr. Rutherford speaks in a different tone.

"Now, Sue, don't let us have any more tears, my child. Instead of crying, you ought to be thinking how merciful your life has been spared. From what I can make of Rupert's story, Justin seems to have run some risk also."

"Yes, papa," says Sue, wiping her eyes, "I thought first that he *must* have been hurt, and oh! how white he looked."

"And so did you, I have no doubt, you don't look very rosy now. Come in to lunch, for I can see you are wanting food, and then we must hear what that poor little man upstairs has to say for himself. He is a terrible pickle."

Then they all go in to luncheon.

Not a word of reproach does Dr. Rutherford speak to the chief culprit, careless Rupert, who brought the loaded gun into the house, but the silence makes Rupert to feel it the more bitterly. He knows that *quiet* looks on his father's face so well—and sees that his father avoids his beseeching glance.

Justin has quite recovered from his fright, but they

all more silent than usual. When they leave the dining-room, Rupert follows his father, while Justin and Sue go into the drawing-room with Floss and Paul, where Justin amuses them all with an account of a journey up the Rhine he once took with his father and mother, telling of the funny adventures they had, and the people they met. After a little while Rupert comes back, looking very grave, and rather crestfallen, and Justin (who guesses what has been taking place) suggests that they should go out.

"Let's take our guns round to Jacob's and ask him to clean them and keep them out of harm's way," says Justin, cheerfully, hoping to comfort his friend, "and next time we go out—"

"I've promised father to have nothing to do with guns until after your party—it was all I could do! Of course it's very hard, but it was my fault as much, or rather *more* than Syd's, for I ought to have known and remembered about the cartridge, and as Syd is going to be punished, of course I ought to give up something too. So I did all I could, and said I would not touch any gun till after the 6th."

"Oh!" says Justin, with a very disappointed face; "I am very sorry—I had hoped—but of course it is only right of you to do it, so there is no more to be said. I sha'n't care about the shooting without you, you may be sure of that."

It has been on the tip of Justin's tongue, to tell Rupert that he has asked several young men of the neighbourhood to come on the 3rd of January, and have a regular shooting party—and how Rupert has missed it! Justin

thinks it kinder not to tell him, in case he should renege the promise, which, as it is, it has cost him some effort to give ; so he spares Rupert the knowledge of what a *real* sacrifice he has unconsciously made, and they go for a walk together.

Sue has a headache, and lies down in her own room, forgetting her frights and troubles in the "Wide, Wide World," and finally going sound asleep, as the light fades and the room darkens.

There, her father finds her when he comes home, glad enough he is to notice that she is her own best friend again, and has nearly forgotten the morning's fright and only remembers it as a cause for thankfulness.



CHAPTER X.

A COMPACT.

CHRISTMAS Day passes very happily with the little Rutherfords, in spite of certain sad recollections of what happened on their last Christmas Day. Their father does his best to be bright and cheerful, and he succeeds in making them all very happy. The presents are much admired, particularly Sue's, being all her own work. But Sue's present from Rupert delights her as much as anything. It is a large coloured photograph of her father in a pretty plush frame—a photograph taken at Rupert's request, and kept a secret by his desire.

In the morning, they go to church, all but Eve and Phyllis, and the walk home through the clear bright air—for there is a slight frost—is very delightful, and they all come in very hungry.

And when they scamper down to dinner, and Eve is put in her high chair on one side of her father and Phyllis on the other, the big turkey comes in, and all the fun and excitement of the Christmas dinner begins.

To greedy boys and girls, this Christmas dinner would

not be much enjoyment. It is true the turkey is plump and tender, and the bread sauce as nice as Sarah's skilful hands can make it, but the pudding is not rich enough to make them all ill the next day, and not one drop of brandy is allowed.

When Paul asks why in so many of the Christmas pictures, the pudding is all on fire, and theirs never is, and Val says he should like to try what it is like, his father answers,

"I am afraid you will have to wait a long time for that, Val. I think if people cannot eat plum-pudding without brandy, they had better let it alone."

And they all agree that that would be a great pity.

"But, father," says Val, "some people say it is more wholesome with brandy."

"I think, Val, those are the people who really like it, and being afraid or ashamed to own it, are obliged to give some other reason. But to those who find plum-pudding unwholesome unless they have burnt brandy with it, I should certainly say, they had better not eat it. After this, I suppose no one wants any pudding."

There is a shout instantly, in which Eve and Phyllis join, though, of course, they understand nothing of the conversation, but any noise is delightful to babyhood.

All the young Rutherfords eat their pudding with great satisfaction and send their plates for more, until the big pudding becomes a very small one.

When dinner is over, in spite of Christmas Day, Dr. Rutherford is obliged to go off and see one or two of his patients, and the children are left to amuse themselves.

As they are playing games in the schoolroom, from which the table and sundry chairs have been cleared, the

door opens and Justin Meadows comes in. Sue is acting head cobbler in hunt-the-slipper, and Val is standing over her with her shoe in his hand, while he gives the most extraordinary directions as to the mending. The children are all shouting with laughter, only Val stands gravely in their midst.

"Now, you quite understand me," says Val, tapping Sue's head gently with the shoe, "you see I want my shoe made very easy, because it's just *here* that the shoe pinches, and I've heard that 'an easy boot bespeaks the freedom of the sole.' Freedom of the sole! That's what I want. And now I wish you to put a neat patch of white kid just here. I prefer white kid, because as blacking has become so common, I intend to have my shoes for the future, polished with whiting. Now remember what I say."

The next moment, Sue catches sight of Justin, whose eyes are sparkling with amusement, and she gives a little startled, "Oh!" Then Justin comes forward and shakes hands with her, saying, with a frank boyish blush,

"A Merry Christmas and many of them, and thank you ever so much for remembering me."

And Sue answers, "Thank you, the same to you. I was very glad that I could do it."

Then Justin passes round to greet the others, and is presently installed on the floor between Sydney and Eve.

"What did you give him?" whispers Rupert to Sue during an interval of the game.

"Oh! nothing *worth* giving, I know; it was only because I thought he was rather lonely and would like something to show that he was not forgotten. I gave

him that flower painting I did last summer, water lilies and reeds—don't you remember it? I wished it was something better!"

"Never mind, it's the idea, not the thing, he cares about. He has everything that money can buy, and yet he does such queer things. I found him the other day, with dirty, oily hands, mending a toy engine that belonged to a little neighbour."

"How nice of him! But I am so glad he can come in here like this, because we can do all we can to make it lively and pleasant for him."

Rupert assents, and the game goes on merrily.

At length, while they are playing blind man's buff, it comes to Justin's turn to be blindfolded, and Rupert ties the handkerchief without mercy. The next moment the door softly opens and Dr. Rutherford enters, and creeps in among the crowd. There is a scuffle, he is almost caught, but at the last moment skilfully substitutes Sue in his place.

Justin stands still; he knows perfectly well who it is he has caught, but he does not know what to call her. "Miss Rutherford" sounds so cold, "Sue" so familiar, "Miss Sue" so like a servant—Justin begins to drag off the handkerchief.

"Stop!" shouts Val, "you haven't guessed. Who is it?"

"Why, of course I know," answers Justin, "there can be no mistake," and in a most determined manner he tugs at the knot.

But Rupert seizes him by the elbows, and cries out that it won't do, and Justin, driven into a corner says, "Your sister, you tiresome fellow. Now let me go!"

"Which sister? You must say! I've got three in the room, and they're all playing."

"It's Miss Rutherford."

There is a perfect yell of laughter.

"Come forward, 'Miss Rutherford,' and let me bandage your eyes," calls Val with mock politeness; "I wonder that a young lady like you can join in such childish amusements. Come, stoop your head, or I can't get at you. Now then, 'Miss Rutherford,' catch whom you can!" and Val with a sudden twist sends her spinning into the middle of the room.

Sue is very angry with Val, and tries to make a clutch at him, but he is gone; she is giddy from the twist given, and feels she is falling. Her father calls out "Take care!" and some one catches and holds her up, but not before her slight fingers have taken a firm hold of the coat sleeve.

"I've caught some one!" she says.

"I think he caught you," remarks Dr. Rutherford, laughing, "but who is it, Sue?"

In the mean time Justin has buttoned his coat over his watch chain and given his curls a smooth in the hope that they will keep in their place, and Rupert has come close, thinking that his near presence may confuse Sue. But Sue does not speak in a hurry.

"Kneel down, please," she says, and her captive obediently drops on one knee. Then she softly draws her fingers over the curly head and down the blushing face, and says decidedly,

"It's Justin."

"Of course it is, 'Miss Rutherford!'" says Val, "and you ought to have made that out a great deal sooner.

We have none of us got curly wigs like that. I am Justin, it's quite lovely to see you blush! How do you do it? Could you teach me?"

"I am afraid not, you are too hardened," answers Justin, his colour justifying Val's attack, "besides you would have too many things to blush for. But I absolutely refuse to be blindfolded again."

And so the game is changed for something else.

Poor Sue! Val gives her no peace, and she is "Miss Rutherford" to the end of the evening.

"Oh dear! I wish you hadn't called me that!" says Sue in a low voice to Justin, as they reassemble, washed and brushed for tea.

"I am very sorry—I wish I hadn't—but I didn't know what to call you."

"Why *Sue*, of course," answers the girl, opening her blue eyes at him, and laughing, "every one calls me Sue."

"Thank you. You can't think what a jolly Christmas Day I've had! You've all been so kind to me, almost like my own brothers and sisters. I am afraid I have been envying Rupert very often this afternoon. Of course, if my father were not such an invalid, it would be different, but it does seem very lonely sometimes."

"I wish we could help you," says Sue in her gentle voice, "I wish we *could* be your brothers and sisters. Shall we adopt you?" and she gives a laugh at her own idea.

"I wish you could!" says Justin, earnestly.

"Very well, I will at any rate, and I am sure Rupert will. I'll ask father, and perhaps he'll adopt you too, and then you will *really* belong to us, you know."



CHAPTER XI.

TEMPER AND A TRAP.

ALAS! for the peace of the community! Alas! for the adopted brother! Next day, after spending some hours with Justin, Rupert comes home looking like a thunder-cloud. He slams the front door, and flinging his cap into a corner, dashes up stairs and locks himself into his own room. There Sue hears him pacing up and down as if in a great rage, and she wonders what can have happened to annoy him.

At last, a few minutes before tea-time, Rupert comes down and finds Sue alone in the dining-room. "Well," he says, with an attempt at a laugh, "so much for Justin's friendship! What do you think he has done?"

"Oh, what?" asks Sue, looking horrified, for Rupert's tone might imply almost any atrocity on Justin's part.

"You know what father made me promise when that tiresome Syd meddled with my gun? Well, I told Justin directly I came from father's study, that I was not to touch a gun again till after the sixth of January,—you were

there and heard it all,—and now he has got a large party of fellows coming to shoot on the third, just because he didn't want me. Of course he *says* he asked them all before, but if he did, why not have said so when I told him about my promise to father? I didn't think he would have done such a mean thing, and I shall never speak to him again—never!”

“Oh! Rupert, how can you be so unjust? I am sure he could not have known about your promise to father. He would never have been so unkind. Or if he had heard about it, he must have forgotten. You ought not to say such horrid things about Justin.”

“Well, I don't care,” says Rupert very crossly, “of course Justin is at liberty to ask whom he likes, when he likes, but it is not what I expected of him, and I shall certainly let him know it. I don't like those sort of friends, who are so fond of you one minute, and are ready to throw you over the next.”

“It seems to me you are describing your own conduct and not Justin's,” says Sue more sharply than she has ever addressed her favourite brother, and in a moment the torrent of his wrath is turned on her.

“Well! I never should have thought you would have taken his part against me. But that is Justin's way, I can see. He is ready to throw over any old friends for a new comer, and you are like him. You would readily give me up for the sake of this ridiculous new idea of an adopted brother. Well, I don't care, and I have no doubt I can get on well enough without either of you!” and Rupert marches out of the room with his head held very high. But when he finds himself alone in the hall,

a sense of loneliness comes over him, a feeling that all interest and enjoyment in life have left him, and at last he seeks refuge from himself in his father's study until the doctor comes in, and then Rupert meekly follows him in to tea.

Dr. Rutherford is much more lively than usual this evening, and the contrast between his better spirits and Rupert's gloomy looks and words, is very marked. Sue is sad and gentle, but Rupert takes no notice of her, and does not look in her direction.

Poor Sue! it is rather hard on her, but she does her best, and at last tea is over.

Dr. Rutherford, after a few minutes, pays no attention to his sulky son, and when tea is over, he is obliged to go out again.

As he is standing in the hall, Sue comes by, and he catches her by the arm, asking in a low tone, "What is wrong with Rupert, Sue? And what is the matter with *you*, my child?"

"Oh, father, Rupert has been so unjust, so unfair! he has been quarrelling with Justin, and then he was angry with me for taking Justin's part, when he knows—"

"Hush! he will hear you. Don't meddle with their quarrels, Sue, but trust me, they will get over it if let alone. Don't vex yourself about it, and try to keep friendly with Rupert, even if he is angry and unjust to others. You will do no good by mixing in his quarrels, and you may have your feelings much hurt. Let them alone, and they will all blow over."

Dr. Rutherford stoops and kisses his daughter's rather puckered brow, upon which she looks up smiling.

"How good you are, papa, dear! But suppose Rupert does not make it up with Justin before the sixth! That would be dreadful."

"Oh! I see now what is troubling you. You shall not lose your party, Sue, nor any of the others their fun if I can help it. Now, I must be off at once."

Sue is happier now that her father has taken the matter into his own hands, and it is not from a selfish fear of losing a pleasant party, though that would be a great disappointment, but it is because she knows what a mortification such a disaster would be to Justin. But the quarrel is settled even sooner than Sue dares to hope.

As she sits in the dining-room by the fire, after Rachel has drawn the curtains and before the lamp has come, her book is in her lap, and her thoughts far away, the door opens softly, and a voice says cautiously,

"Sue!"

In a moment Sue jumps up and whispers, "Justin!"

"Yes, don't tell any one. I—I just came over for a minute to see you and ask about Rupert. Is he very savage?"

"Yes, very."

"Did he tell you all about it?"

"Yes, at least he said you had arranged a shooting party for the third, and he could not go because of his promise."

"Yes, I know it looks bad, but really they were all asked before, and I did not like to add to his disappointment at the time by telling him of it. I wish I had now! I am just as sorry as he is, for it won't be half the fun

without him. Did he tell you—did he tell you that he made me very angry!"

"No, he never said a word about that. I do not wonder you were angry, though, I know I was."

"Thank you," says Justin simply, "it is kind of you to feel for me. I was afraid you might believe what Rupert did, and think I had arranged it on purpose. And then he—he wouldn't believe me when I said that they had all been asked before. *That* made me angry, and I think after that, I was as much to blame as he was, because I answered him very hastily and made matters worse. So I have come over to see if he will listen to me, and to say how sorry I am about it, and that I will ask all the fellows to come again on the fourteenth, and hope he will be able to come then. Where is Rupert?"

"Out somewhere setting rat-traps. He and Val went off after tea. Floss is with Miss Griggs, and the little ones are in the nursery. There is no one here but I. But I dare say Rupert will be in soon. Can you wait for him?"

"Yes, a little while," and Justin follows Sue's example, and sits down on a low stool on one side of the rug, while she returns to her place on the other.

"Shall I ring for the lamp?" asks Sue, after a pause, during which she has been wondering how she can entertain this newly adopted brother.

"Not for me, thank you. I like the firelight better," and then Justin leans back dreamily, and there is another silence.

"How is your father?" asks Sue suddenly, hoping to lead up to a conversation.

"Much the same, thank you," is the reply.

"He has always been a great invalid, has he not?" say Sue, and Justin answers,

"Yes, ever since his accident, seventeen years ago," and the conversation ceases.

At last, just as Sue is beginning to wish that Justin would either talk or go, the front door is burst open, and Val with a white, horrified face, rushes into the dining-room.

"Is father out still? Oh! Sue, come to Rupert at once! He has caught his hand in one of those horrible traps and he is in a dreadful state. Come quick!" and off goes Val, followed by Sue and Justin.

In the barn, by the light of a flickering tallow candle, they find Rupert sitting in a cramped position, his left hand on the ground out of sight, his right hand supporting his head. As they draw near, he looks up and says hoarsely.

"Don't touch me! Don't come near me!" and seems to shrink even from their pitying looks.

"Is his hand still in the trap?" asks Justin, and Val nods, adding,

"He tried to get it out, but he couldn't, and he howled when I touched it. What is to be done?"

Sue's white face is full of pity, but she has not nerve enough to give any assistance, so Justin is the first to come to the rescue.

He lifts the candle and brings it round to where its light can fall on the wounded hand. The sight makes him give an involuntary shiver.

"Sue," he says gently, hoping to spare her some pain





ght, "you must go in quickly and ask Rachel for
of warm water and a lot of soft rag. Make haste,
ing it yourself."

runs away, thankful to do anything, and Justin
the most of the time before her return.

re, Val, you must help me," he says, and trying
his ears to Rupert's pleadings to be left alone, he
e trap and the wounded hand as carefully as he
Even that touch brings a groan to Rupert's lips,
tries to draw the hand away, but Justin will not
eat.

u *must* let me open the trap, Rupert, or it will get
uch worse. Do try and bear it, and the pain will
er presently. Val, hold his wrist."

somehow, between them, they open the trap and
ad is set free. But even then their troubles are
er, for Rupert gives a horrible yell of pain, and
backward over the candle, and they are left in total
ss.

is is awful," groans Val ; "what's to be done now?"
t off and bring a light," calls Justin in a suppressed
nd Val gropes his way out of the barn as quickly
an.

n the light comes, Justin sees that Rupert has

How are they to get him in !

ever, after a moment of dismay, Justin, exerting
strength, takes Rupert in his arms like a baby, and
him into the house, while Sue brings the linen and
the water. Then no one quite knows what to
he hand has been badly crushed and cut across
m and knuckles, and it is bleeding fast, Rupert

We have none of us got curly wigs like that. I say Justin, it's quite lovely to see you blush! How do you do it? Could you teach me?"

"I am afraid not, you are too hardened," answers Justin, his colour justifying Val's attack, "besides you would have too many things to blush for. But I absolutely refuse to be blindfolded again."

And so the game is changed for something else.

Poor Sue! Val gives her no peace, and she is "Miss Rutherford" to the end of the evening.

"Oh dear! I wish you hadn't called me that!" says Sue in a low voice to Justin, as they reassemble, washed and brushed for tea.

"I am very sorry—I wish I hadn't—but I didn't know what to call you."

"Why *Sue*, of course," answers the girl, opening her blue eyes at him, and laughing, "every one calls me Sue."

"Thank you. You can't think what a jolly Christmas Day I've had! You've all been so kind to me, almost like my own brothers and sisters. I am afraid I have been envying Rupert very often this afternoon. Of course, if my father were not such an invalid, it would be different, but it does seem very lonely sometimes."

"I wish we could help you," says Sue in her gentle voice, "I wish we *could* be your brothers and sister. Shall we adopt you?" and she gives a laugh at her own idea.

"I wish you could!" says Justin, earnestly.

"Very well, I will at any rate, and I am sure Rupert will. I'll ask father, and perhaps he'll adopt you too and then you will *really* belong to us, you know."

"don't try to talk, because we know all about it. Just lie still and you will feel better presently."

Rupert, however, cannot quite follow this advice. He looks anxiously round him, and asks doubtfully, "Is Justin here?"

"Yes, here I am. What can I do for you, dear old fellow?"

"Forgive me!" answers Rupert, holding out his right hand.

"That is just what I came to ask *you* to do," answers Justin, giving the hand a gentle pressure, "I think you ought to forgive me."

And so the quarrel ends.



CHAPTER XII.

AUNT COSY.

RUPERT is a very interesting invalid, for the next two or three days. He is obliged to keep in his room, for he cannot dress, and so he spends his time in an arm-chair by the fire, attired in a bright-coloured dressing gown of his father's, and the whole household minister to his many wants. But he is unusually humble with Sue and Justin, and Dr. Rutherford is satisfied to find that there will be no trouble with him on the sixth.

One morning, after visiting his patient, Dr. Rutherford calls Sue, and puts a letter into her hand.

"This partly concerns you and Rachel; you will see what Aunt Cosy says about her room, and I hope, my child, that you will be kind and considerate to your aunt and remember that she has already plenty of troubles of her own. She has just parted from Uncle Jeff, and perhaps they may never meet again, for he seems very weak and ill."

"Poor Uncle Jeff!" says Sue sorrowfully; "how s

it is! Papa, you need not be afraid about me, because I am very glad Aunt Cosy is coming now, because she may be able to manage Rupert, and no one else can, unless, perhaps, it is Justin. He hurt his hand again to-day, trying to use it, and he won't always keep it in the sling, as you have said he should."

"If you knew as much of sick people as I do, Sue, you would think Rupert fairly patient and obedient. It is impossible to *insist* upon perfect obedience in a sick room, and you may often do much harm in trying to do a patient good against his will. You must put up with Rupert's whims a little longer, and if he will use his hand, he must find out by experience, that it will hurt him. It is not bad enough to be really serious, though it will take some time to heal. Aunt Cosy has had plenty of hard experience in nursing, and she will soon find means of taming Rupert and making him more reasonable. He will not listen to you, for you are his sister, and younger than he is, so however good your advice may be, you must expect him to turn up his boyish nose at it."

"It is a pity that brothers are so tiresome!" sighs Sue.

"Yes, is it not!" says Dr. Rutherford, in a tone and with a twinkle in his eyes that makes Sue exclaim,

"Oh! papa, you're laughing at me all the time."

"You forget, my dear child, that I hear both sides of the case. Rupert told me this morning that you are most kind and attentive to him, but that you are always worrying about his hand every time he moves. He made no complaint, Sue, for he said that it was quite wonderful to see how anxious you were for him to get well; but he owned that it fidgeted him, and that he had most cause to re-

member his hand, as it continues painful enough to be a most unpleasant reminder. He said you treated him like a baby."

"Oh! papa, I only begged him not to use it, because you yourself said how important it was to keep it quiet and he would not listen to a word I said. He wanted some of his tools for his carving, and I would not give them to him."

"No, but I did. If you had listened, you would have known that he only wanted to sort them properly, and arrange them in his tool-box, which he could easily do with one hand. He only used his left out of bravado while you were there, and he confessed it afterwards to me. I do not tell you this to find fault with you, my darling, but because I want you to understand how impossible it is to rule a self-willed boy like Rupert, by finding fault with him. If you do silently what he asks as long as it is a possible and fairly reasonable request you will find that he will be far more willing to give way to you than if you read him all the lectures in the world."

"It seems to me, papa, that boys are like the Irish pig, which had to be driven in the opposite direction in order to induce him to take the right one."

"My dear, if the simile pleases you, well and good, but I should advise you not to let Rupert hear it. He would neither feel pleased nor flattered."

Sue laughs, and goes off with Aunt Cosy's letter to find Rachel and consult her about the coming visitor.

That evening Mrs. Turrell, or Aunt Cosy as the children call her, arrives at the cottage. She is a small

round, brown-eyed woman, whose thick, dark hair is plentifully sprinkled with grey, brought there by trouble and anxiety. Aunt Cosy is still pale and red-eyed from her recent parting with Uncle Jeff, but she brings no sadness with her, and as soon as may be, is her own bright, comfortable self, that they have always known, and which gained for her, even as a child, the nickname of "Cosy."

Sue towers over her little aunt, and follows her about, until at length, when they are standing before the fire alone in Aunt Cosy's room, Sue suddenly finds herself drawn down into the rays of the fire, and her aunt kneeling down by her side, says,

"Let me look at you, Sue, I have not seen you yet, and you have grown—how the child has grown! You are very like your mother, dear."

"Am I?" and Sue gives a bright, glad smile, not because her mother was beautiful, but because she hopes her mind is growing like her, as well as her face. "But don't you think Rupert is very like her too? Sometimes he looks the image of her."

"Yes, I can see what you mean, but it is a different view of her face. Now, tell me about the others, Sue, let me know something of them before we meet to-morrow. Rupert I know—dear boy! he was so sweet when he stayed with us last midsummer—Uncle Jeff enjoyed having him so much. But tell me about Val, he looks such a fine fellow, so bright and bold."

"Yes, that describes Val exactly. He is very fearless, and oh! so tiresome sometimes."

"Is he? Well, I like a boy who *can* be troublesome,

and I hope I shall not find him very terrible. Then comes my prim little godchild."

"Oh! yes, Floss is always good, at least always very proper and well behaved. She is very aggravating sometimes, but not like Val."

"And those dear little fellows, Paul and Sydney, tell me about them."

"Oh! Paul is generally good enough, at least, he would be if it were not for Sydney, and Syd is always in some mischief. He is the most troublesome little monkey, and gets Paul into no end of scrapes. Then comes Eve, she is such a tiny, but she is very wilful sometimes, and of course Phyllis is such a baby that she is nothing at present."

"And there has been no one but you and nurse and Miss Griggs to look after all this party? Poor Sydney! no wonder he looks so pale and thin!"

"Don't you think papa looks much better?" asks Sue in surprise.

"Yes, dear, much better than when I saw him last, but he looks careworn, as if he had felt the sad responsibility of having such a family on his hands. You could not have prevented it, Sue, though perhaps in time you may do so. It requires an older head than yours to manage such a large party."

"But Aunt Cosy, I have told you nothing about my other brother—my new, adopted brother, Justin Meadows."

"Who is he?" asks Aunt Cosy, watching the earnest face that is turned to the fire.

"Oh! a schoolfellow of Rupert's, and a neighbour of

urs. He is so nice, Aunt Cosy, I am sure you will like him. He is just six months older than Rupert, and he is so kind, and gentle, and good to us all. We are to go to his birthday party on the sixth, and there is to be a Christmas tree, because Eve wanted to see one so much."

"But why is he an adopted brother? Have you not quite enough of your own?"

"Yes, I have, but then *he* has none, no brothers or sisters, so Rupert and father and I took him in as one of us. I am sure you will like him, Aunt Cosy."

"I hope I may, Sue, but how is it that this adopted brother is the only one you can praise? You seem to find the others so tiresome."

Sue laughs, but colours a little as she answers, "I don't know how that is, Auntie, only it is quite true, and you'll find it out for yourself by-and-by."

And then Sue jumps up and insists upon helping her aunt with her unpacking, so that in a short time Mrs. Turrell's modest possessions are all installed in their places, and she goes down with Sue into the comfortable, well lighted sitting-room.

Here a most noisy welcome awaits her from the little ones, who have insisted on sitting up to see Aunt Cosy; Sydney in particular is much attracted by her gentle motherly ways, and does not even resent when she asks him his bed-time, and reminds him that the hour is already passed.

Paul nestles close to her and takes her hand, though he does not speak, and Floss brings her stool to her grandmother's feet, and stitches away in happy consciousness that she is the best behaved of the whole party.

Rupert is down for the first time since his accident, and lies like a wounded hero on the sofa, watching and listening, while Sue, with a feeling of relief that she is no longer responsible for the good behaviour of the little ones, kneels down by Rupert's sofa, and talks in a low voice to him.

As they sit there, the door suddenly opens, and a voice says quickly,

"How's Rupert, Sue?" upon which Sue springs up and Rupert gives a shout.

"Ah! you didn't expect to find me down so soon—confess that you didn't! You came to have a game with Sue and the babies. Now didn't you? Confess, Justin confess."

"Well, and suppose I did—I like babies—that is to say if you call Paul and Syd babies. I don't."

"Aunt Cosy, what do you say to that?" and Rupert laughs as Justin faces round with a most startled look of wonder.

Mrs. Turrell has been sitting in a corner near the fire, completely hidden from Justin by the head of the sofa. As he looks at her, she rises and holds out her hand.

"I have already heard of you," she says pleasantly. "I did not know when I arrived that I had one more nephew."

Justin laughs, colours, and looks pleased, and then sits down by Rupert's side and congratulates him on his return to the family circle. In a short time, however, Justin remembers that he must not go home late, that his father wants him, that his mother asked him not to stay long, that he has a thousand and one things to do.

and in spite of much pleading, he turns a deaf ear to it all and goes away. Sue follows him to close the front door, "because it isn't worth disturbing Rachel," and to her he says,

"I am afraid I sha'n't come here quite as often now, Sue."

"Oh! why not? What is the matter?"

"Nothing, only I am sure your aunt will not like to have me hanging about here as I have done lately. She is quite right, it wastes my time and makes you waste yours, but it was very pleasant—wasn't it, Sue?"

"Oh! yes," says Sue dolefully, "and you generally kept Rupert in such a good temper! But we shall see you on the sixth!"

"Oh! yes, and before that, I hope."

"Sue!" calls Aunt Cosy, and Justin goes out with a little laugh at Sue's dismayed face, and Sue returns to the drawing-room feeling that the pleasures and pains of life are very mixed.



CHAPTER XIII.

PREPARATIONS.

ON the third of January, Rupert is very melancholy. It is true that his hand is not well enough yet for him to carry a gun, but he would have liked to have been of the party, and he is consequently very cross and disagreeable all the morning.

Justin is engaged with his visitors and cannot come and visit his friend that day, consequently Sue and Valentine have hard work to keep Sultan Rupert in a fairly civil temper. However, they manage pretty well, and as the evening comes, Justin walks in with a present of game.

At the sight of his friend, Rupert cheers up, and becomes amiable at once, taking the deepest interest in such information as "Smith shot abominably, and Brown was better than we expected. Robinson and Jones were pretty fair, and Green shot very well, but Jacob kept saying how he wished you were there."

"Oh! but you know I can't shoot a bit," says Rupert, much flattered all the same.

"But he likes you much better than the other fellows. He says you'll be a very good shot in time, if you will learn to be more careful. I am almost jealous of you, for Jacob never praises me."

"That is only because you never will let him. You should have heard what he said of you the other day. He told me what you had done for his youngest boy—"

"Oh! that old story! I have heard his version of that a dozen times," and Justin turns away from Rupert and begins to pull Floss gently by her pet curl.

From any one else, such a liberty would arouse that young lady's extremest wrath, but there is as much caressing as teasing in Justin's soft pull, and in the voice in which he asks,

"How much for this, Floss?"

"Oh! a great deal," says Floss, trying to withdraw her head beyond the range of his fingers.

"Sixpence?"

"Oh dear no!"

"A shilling, then?"

"No!"

"Come, I'll make you a handsome offer. Five shillings or the lot! You'll never get such an offer again, Floss."

"No, indeed, I should hope not," replies Floss with great dignity.

Justin laughs in his most teasing tones.

"You'll part with one for much less some day!" he says; "but mayn't I have a little bit? just to take back to school as a consolation."

This sounds rather nice, and Floss begins to bridle a little, when Rupert exclaims,

"I wouldn't give him a single hair, if I were J Floss. What do you think he will do with it?"

"Oh! what?"

"He will put it in a box containing his treasures, which are, a large portion of his beloved pony Quince's tail, one of Pixie's first teeth, and a bundle of green feathers belonging to a defunct parrot. How would your precious curls feel in such company, eh?"

Floss only tosses her head, while Justin shakes his fist at Rupert, exclaiming,

"You promised, when I showed you that box, never to allude to its contents!"

"So I did! I beg your pardon, but I quite forgot. I have no doubt that it will go no further. Aunt Cosy will you promise not to reveal to others the mystery of Justin's sentimental treasures?"

"Certainly, and I do not think I shall run any risk of being questioned on the subject, for no one could suspect what Justin's treasures are. But I can sympathise with him. When I was a girl, I wore a locket with a pony hair on one side and a pet dog's on the other. I have the locket still."

"I am afraid the days of romance in hair are over," says Justin; "hair bracelets and hair chains are out of fashion, hair rings are hardly ever seen, and I am dreadfully afraid that a postman of these days would hardly respect a letter which had no stronger fastening than a lady's hair."

"Yes," answers Aunt Cosy, "but I think I should prefer a sensible envelope at any time. But I remember seeing a very pretty book-marker that a friend of mine had

embroidered with her own hair, instead of silk. It had a very good effect, and made a very pretty souvenir."

The next moment, Justin tilts back his chair until he can see Sue's face bent over her work.

"Sue—make me a book-marker like that—will you?" he asks.

"To put in your treasure box?" she retorts laughing.

"No, I promise not to put it there. Will you?"

"Where will you put it?" she says, for Sue is always rather sensitive about her gifts if they are not properly used.

"I'll put it in a book I use every day."

"What book?"

Justin colours, and for a moment does not answer, but as Sue repeats, "Won't you tell me what book?" he answers rather shortly,

"My Bible, of course."

"Oh!—yes, I'll make you one—if I *can*."

Aunt Cosy is the only one of the party who has overheard this conversation, and she readily promises to help Sue with her taste and advice. Soon after Dr. Rutherford comes in, and then Justin goes home to his late dinner.

Poor Rupert! his injured hand is a hard trial to him now, particularly when Justin comes next day to ask for help with the Christmas tree. Sue and Valentine are at once requested to give their valuable assistance, and while the former is putting on her hat and jacket, and Val is vainly hunting for his knitted comforter, Justin goes over to Rupert's chair and leans over him.

"I'm so sorry you can't come to-day, Rupert, but I want you to be all right by Thursday. How is the hand getting on?"

"Father says it is doing well," answers Rupert in a disheartened tone. "It's all right as long as I keep quiet in this sling, but I forget sometimes, and it doesn't it hurt, just! It's getting better though, ever much better. You'll find Val very useful."

It is an effort on Rupert's part to say this, for he is very jealous of his younger brother on this occasion, and is only consoled by Justin's saying,

"Never mind, it will be all the greater surprise to you and I know there is *one* thing which you will like very much."


"What?" asks Rupert, rousing and looking interested.

"If I tell you, it will be no surprise," laughs Justin and escapes before Rupert has time to frame another question.

Sue has not been inside the Park House before, though she has occasionally seen Mrs. Meadows, and to-day she is troubled with an unusual fit of shyness.

Mrs. Meadows meets them in the hall, and takes Sue into her boudoir where she leaves her hat and jacket and then she follows her hostess into the library.

Sue has thought that Mr. Meadows must be a very alarming person, for she has never seen him. She has heard accounts of his cleverness, his wonderful memory, his books, and at times his eccentricity; she has also heard of his ill-health, and his inability to walk, so that she has imagined to herself a very different man from the gentle, bright-eyed invalid who welcomes her with a smile. She would not know he was a cripple but for the great wheels of his chair, and his first words are full of kindness.



"So this is my new daughter! We must be great friends, Sue."

"Daughter!" echoes Sue colouring shyly.

"Yes, Justin's sister must be my daughter, must she not?"

"The relationships are getting a little mixed," laughs Justin, as he sees that Sue, though much flattered, does not know how to answer. "Now, father, have you written the numbers for us?" and the business of the Christmas tree begins.

Val is, as Justin punningly remarks, *invaluable*. To him is given the task of tying the different little toys on the tree, which is also brilliant with candles, reflectors, and coloured balls. There is also a shelf round the stem of the tree, which Mrs. Meadows remarks will be covered on the day.

Every one of the company is to have a number, the list being kept by Mrs. Meadows, so that neither Sue nor Val can tell which of the pretty little toys will fall to their share.

There are twenty-five numbers in all, and the young people have hard work in sorting and numbering, tying and wiring all the things before Val can hang them. And before the morning seems half over, the butler announces that luncheon is ready.

It is with some reluctance that the young people leave their work for such an unnecessary thing as a meal!



CHAPTER XIV.

AN ENCOUNTER.

IT is dark before the Christmas tree is thoroughly decorated, and then Justin walks back with Sue and Val. As they go home through the dusky lanes, they meet a crowd of rough-looking boys. The path is narrow, and the road dirty, yet the boys seem to have no idea of making way for those whom they happen to meet.

Unfortunately, Justin has no intention of having Sue turned off the path into the muddy road.

"Keep behind me, close to the wall," he says quickly, and the next moment Justin steadies himself, while he and the foremost boy meet shoulder to shoulder with a shock that sends three of the boys spinning like ninepins into the road.

There is a shout of fury, and the boys turn savagely upon Justin, who says quietly,

"I beg your pardon. I am afraid I knocked against one of you."

The boys are angry, and would like to quarrel, but

Justin's calmness and politeness are too much for them, they can only growl very discontentedly, and ask indignantly what he means.

"I don't mean anything," answers Justin, and then, to his great indignation, one of the party who is smoking, suddenly strikes a match, and holds the light full in Sue's terrified face.

She shrinks back, the match goes out very suddenly, while there is great noise and confusion. Sue is conscious that Justin very decidedly puts her behind him, and that some blows are being given and taken, for she can hear that Justin's breath comes in short, angry pants. She begins to be dreadfully afraid that her party will be overpowered by numbers, when the smoker again strikes a light, and this time Valentine's face is for a moment shown to the group, as he stands with his back to the wall, with flashing eyes and set lips.

"Stop! It's the doctor's son," he says quickly.

"One of Maskell's boys, down with him!" shouts another, whom Val instantly sets down as belonging to the Grammar school, there being a deadly feud between the two houses.

There are some ironical cheers for Maskell's school, a little more blustering on the part of the most warlike, and they pass on, leaving Val with the uncomfortable knowledge that they have seen and recognised him, but that he does not know one of them.

Justin and Val put Sue between them, and though at first her feet seem unable to move, so great has been her alarm, she gets home somehow.

"Sue, you'd better not say much about this row to the

others," says Justin as they come into the garden; "of course we shall tell your father, but don't let the others know, if you can help it."

And Sue promises silence.

Dr. Rutherford does not say much in answer to the boys' story, he only smiles a little at Justin, and says,

"I am afraid, my dear boy, that you have got too much of the spirit of reform in you."

"What do you mean, Dr. Rutherford?" asks Justin in surprise.

"You wished to give those fellows a lesson in good manners. Do you think you have succeeded?"

Justin colours, and answers frankly,

"No, I don't."

"Then what have you done? Possibly made half-a-dozen enemies for Val, whom you say they recognised. You will find out later in life, that it is often wiser and better to step aside into the muddy road, and let ill-manners and impertinence go by unchallenged, than to stop and give battle, and run the risk of being defeated. I am afraid Sue must have had rather a fright."

"Oh! she was very brave, father, and never screamed, even when one of the wretches flourished a lighted match in her face. She has promised not to tell the others."

"Very well, I hope you will not meet those boys on your way back, Justin. If you do, turn out of your way and see how they take it."

"I don't mind, when there isn't a girl with me!" answers Justin, a little wrathfully; "I should not have minded for myself."

"And you think it was pleasanter for Sue to be in that

ow, than for her to get her feet muddy! Justin, if you wish to show *real* consideration for a woman, never get her into a quarrel, or quarrel yourself in her presence, if you can possibly prevent it. I think if you had given Sue her choice this evening, she would have preferred muddy boots."

And Sue, coming in at that moment, fully agrees with her father's statement as to her feelings on the subject. Then they tell Dr. Rutherford what preparations they have made for Thursday, and after that Justin says good-night.

On his way home he does meet the same lot of boys, and taking Dr. Rutherford's advice, he steps out of their way. They take no notice of him, possibly because they are quarrelling among themselves, and Justin, as he walks on, congratulates himself that Sue is not within hearing.

The smell of bad tobacco is borne on the breeze, and Justin is glad when he thinks of the promise he has made his father—namely not to try smoking of any kind until he is five-and-twenty.

At Dr. Rutherford's house there is a very noisy party that evening, for Sue and Val have much to tell of what they have done and seen that day at the Park House. The children try hard to induce them to tell what toys and pretty things they have seen for the Christmas tree, but this is against the rules, and Sue says they must wait, "it isn't so very long, you know."

"No," says Floss gravely, "but then *you've* seen the things and know all about them."

"I don't know anything," replies Sue, "I haven't the *least* idea what is coming to any one of us. Everything was numbered, and Mrs. Meadows said she had a paper

with the names and the numbers written down, neither Val nor I know what our number

There is a sigh of satisfaction from the young people, for they are much relieved on finding Sue as ignorant as themselves.

"And what does the tree look like?" asks

"Beautiful!" answers Val, trying to put her on Rupert's sofa, who immediately, and somehow removes them.

"And did you see it all blazing?" asks Paul

"No, of course not, you goose. It was day all the time."

"Oh! I see," and Paul subsides, as Sydney

"Were there *lots* of crackers and sweeties?"

"Yes, I dare say there were some. Were they?" and Sue laughs and nods, and then Val laughs

"Why are you laughing?" asks Floss, rather

"Oh! we mustn't say, must we, Val?" and both laugh again in a manner that is decidedly and provoking to those who are not in the secret.

Finding that the peace of the party is in danger, Aunt Cosy calls Floss to her, and says in a gentle voice

"Do you remember how I used to tell you about Floss?"

"Oh! yes, Aunt Cosy, *such* nice ones. I liked what you told us. Will you tell one now?"

"Yes, I will read you one, if you care to listen."

In a moment Floss has established herself at the piano, and is waiting in expectation, when at last "the story," the others all gather round, and even Val, his chair nearer his aunt, asking,

"May we all hear it?"

"Oh! yes, every one may listen if they like, but I am going to read my story to Floss, because she is my god-child, and I wrote my stories on purpose for her."

No objection is made to this, and Aunt Cosy brings a roll of manuscript from her desk, only Rupert from the other side of the room asks suddenly,

"Has the story a name, Aunt Cosy?"

"Certainly. It is called *Silk*."

"*Silk*? What a very strange name!" some of them say, "why is it called '*Silk*,' Aunt Cosy?"

"Because it is about silk, as you will see. Now, if you are all ready, I will begin."



Silk.

PART I.

MABEL de Vere woke up one bright sunny morning and remembered that it was her birthday that she was now eight years old. At that age it is a great event, and Mabel's was always on a day and holiday.

The sun shone brightly in at her window, and she sprang up at once to look at him, but as he was so brilliant to be looked at, she dropped back on to her bed and began thinking of all the delightful things that would happen that day. First there would be her birthday party, which she always had such delightful ones, and she remembered that a box which had arrived the night before, from her grandmamma, for Mrs. de Vere had sent it away as Mabel came into the room, but not that the child's quick eyes had seen it.

Then Mabel was to have a new frock, her mother had promised her one, and it was to be the prettiest that Mrs. de Vere could get. And last—but by no means

there was to be a picnic in a wood, about seven miles off, and five little cousins were to come to it. Mabel, I am sorry to say, was rather troublesome that morning while nurse was brushing her hair, and did not set her little sister Violet a very good example, which she ought to have done, particularly as she thought herself now two years older than Vi, who was only "six and three quarters."

But at last Mabel was dressed, and with a very happy face she went down to the breakfast room.

Yes, there were the presents piled up on her plate and on her chair, so with a cry of delight Mabel began hastily to examine them.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Mr. de Vere, "is this the way to behave on a birthday? I think, Mabel, another time, we shall have to keep our presents until you have said 'good morning' to mamma and me as you always do."

Mabel hung her head for a moment, then leaving the delightful brown paper parcel she was just untying, she went round and kissed her mamma and papa, wishing them both good morning.

"That is better," said Mr. de Vere; "good morning and many happy returns of the day to my little birthday girl. Why, what a lucky child you are! No one gives me so many presents on my birthday."

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried Mabel, as each new parcel was unfastened; "thank you—thank you *ever* so much! I seem to get nicer presents every year! I am sure this lovely doll is from grandmamma, and this book is from papa, he has written my name and his own inside! This darling little work-box is from you, mamma, and Vi—dear little Vi! has given me this paint-box. I have been

wanting a paint-box for ever so long ! Nurse's present this nice pincushion, which is very pretty, and now I sh not lose my pins as I used to do. Mamma, I think th is the most delightful birthday I ever had ! I only ho that it will keep as nice all day long !"

"I hope it will," said Mrs. de Vere, "and in on that it may, I hope you will be very good and obedi all day."

"Yes, mamma, people are always good on their bi days," answered Mabel.

Mabel could hardly eat any breakfast, she was so m excited, and she grew rather impatient, for it seemed her as if every one else ate twice as much as they usu did.

At last Mrs. de Vere said that the children might up to the nursery and play together, but warned them to tire themselves, as then they would not enjoy t picnic, and their little cousins were to arrive at elev o'clock.

Mab and Vi were very happy finding places for the n treasures in drawers, book-cases, and toy cupboar after which they played a very favourite game, which th called "punting."

This game was played by taking the cover of a v large, oval clothes-basket and laying it upon the floor, that—to a childish mind—it looked something like boat.

The children then sat inside (it was a very tight and pushed themselves about with a walking-stick belo ing to Mr. de Vere.

The boat did not move along very quickly, but t

children always pretended it did, which satisfied them just as well.

As they were making a very dangerous voyage to India, "to call upon Uncle George, you know," Mabel exclaimed that there was a storm, which occasioned much confusion on board.

Vi cast herself into the sea, that is to say, jumped on to the strip of green carpet, Mabel heroically followed her example, and for the next few minutes they plunged about on the floor, as if swimming vigorously.

At the moment that the boat upset, Mrs. de Vere came into the nursery, followed by nurse who carried the new birthday frock.

In a moment the shipwreck was over and the ship abandoned, while Mab and Vi came to look and admire.

It was a very pretty, pale blue frock, of very soft thin silk, made very simply and looking so fresh and childlike that every one who saw it, thought it the sweetest little frock they had ever seen.

Mabel at once wished to try it on, and when she saw how nice it looked and how well it fitted, she did not at all like taking it off.

"Mamma," she said, "mayn't I keep it on? I really sha'n't hurt it, and it is so pretty, I want my cousins to see it. If I wear a pinafore it cannot be spoilt. *Do* let me wear it until they come, *do*, mamma, as it is my birthday."

"I am afraid you may spoil it, if you are playing with Vi, and that would be a great pity. You know you are very forgetful and careless about your clothes; but as you are so very anxious to wear it, perhaps this time you will

be careful. So if you will keep quiet till the child come, you may keep it on for them to see, and then can put on the holland frock for the picnic."

So the blue silk frock was not taken off, and as it could not "punt" any more, Mab and Vi (who was Mab's shadow, always doing what her sister did) sat down to paint. Two very flushed, eager faces were leaned over the table, while Mab produced a lady in a wonderful green dress, sitting in an arbour with a green dog by side, (this was a mistake, the dog was intended to have been brown, but the brush had not been washed properly and was full of green paint;) the lady's face was a deep red, almost purple, and her hair was a thick black mass.

Vi's picture was a very original and curious one, but a blue dog, watching a flock of pink sheep in a yellow field.

Just as the last touches were being put to the painting the bell rang to say that the children were to go down the drawing-room, as their little cousins had arrived.

Down went Mab and Vi, and there they found their cousins sitting shyly in the drawing-room, each clutching tight a parcel which held some little present for Mabel.

There was nothing in the five little packets that Mabel cared very much about, but Mabel thanked them all for remembering her, and then led them up stairs to the nursery, that they might see the *really* beautiful things she had received that morning.

But first I must tell you who these cousins were.

Tom, Carrie, and Bobby were "Aunt Ellen's children" as Mab often called them. They were thoroughly cou-

children, accustomed to run wild, for they usually did just as they pleased during their playtime, for they went to a day school near their home. They were nicely, but very simply dressed, as their papa was not able to afford them expensive things.

Frank and Belle were "Aunt Fanny's children;" they lived in London, in a beautiful house close to the park, and their papa was a very rich man.

Belle was so prettily dressed, that for a moment Mabel thought her own blue silk did not look nearly as nice as Belle's brown one with its orange-coloured sash, and a bright orange bow to tie up her dark hair; but Carrie admired Mab's dress so much, and every one thought it so pretty, that she soon felt quite happy about its superiority to all others.

The presents were admired also, though Belle unfortunately said that grandmamma's doll was not nearly as big as one *she* had had given to her by a gentleman on her last birthday. It had been the size of a real baby, and had worn one of Belle's own baby frocks, and the long cloak that had been hers when she was christened, and when she took it out with her, every one thought it was a real baby. All this was rather trying to Mabel, who felt that she was quite eclipsed by Belle's grandeur, for Tom, Carrie, and Bobby listened open-mouthed. Mabel was, I fear, jealous to find that Belle had quite as many pretty toys as she had, and some that were even prettier, and she thought that *she* ought to be the chief person at her own birthday party.

By the time the children were called to dress, Mabel had worked herself up into a very uncomfortable state of

others," says Justin as they come into the garden. "Of course we shall tell your father, but don't let the world know, if you can help it."

And Sue promises silence.

Dr. Rutherford does not say much in answer to Justin's story, he only smiles a little at Justin, and says

"I am afraid, my dear boy, that you have got much of the spirit of reform in you."

"What do you mean, Dr. Rutherford?" asks Justin in surprise.

"You wished to give those fellows a lesson in good manners. Do you think you have succeeded?"

Justin colours, and answers frankly,

"No, I don't."

"Then what have you done? Possibly made a dozen enemies for Val, whom you say they recognise. You will find out later in life, that it is often wiser to step aside into the muddy road, and let the manners and impertinence go by unchallenged, than to stop and give battle, and run the risk of being defeated. I am afraid Sue must have had rather a fright."

"Oh! she was very brave, father, and never screamed even when one of the wretches flourished a lighted stick in her face. She has promised not to tell the other boys."

"Very well, I hope you will not meet those boys on your way back, Justin. If you do, turn out of your way and see how they take it."

"I don't mind, when there isn't a girl with me," says Justin, a little wrathfully; "I should not wonder if I were minded for myself."

"And you think it was pleasanter for Sue to be i

row, than for her to get her feet muddy! Justin, if you wish to show *real* consideration for a woman, never get her into a quarrel, or quarrel yourself in her presence, if you can possibly prevent it. I think if you had given Sue her choice this evening, she would have preferred muddy boots."

And Sue, coming in at that moment, fully agrees with her father's statement as to her feelings on the subject. Then they tell Dr. Rutherford what preparations they have made for Thursday, and after that Justin says good-night.

On his way home he does meet the same lot of boys, and taking Dr. Rutherford's advice, he steps out of their way. They take no notice of him, possibly because they are quarrelling among themselves, and Justin, as he walks on, congratulates himself that Sue is not within hearing.

The smell of bad tobacco is borne on the breeze, and Justin is glad when he thinks of the promise he has made his father—namely not to try smoking of any kind until he is five-and-twenty.

At Dr. Rutherford's house there is a very noisy party that evening, for Sue and Val have much to tell of what they have done and seen that day at the Park House. The children try hard to induce them to tell what toys and pretty things they have seen for the Christmas tree, but this is against the rules, and Sue says they must wait, "it isn't so very long, you know."

"No," says Floss gravely, "but then *you've* seen the things and know all about them."

"I don't know anything," replies Sue, "I haven't the *least* idea what is coming to any one of us. Everything was numbered, and Mrs. Meadows said she had a paper

"Beautiful!" answers Val, trying to put his Rupert's sofa, who immediately, and somewhat removes them.

"And did you see it all blazing?" asks Paul.

"No, of course not, you goose. It was daylight all the time."

"Oh! I see," and Paul subsides, as Sydney d

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Finding that the peace of the party is in dang Cosy calls Floss to her, and says in a gentle voic

"Do you remember how I used to tell you Floss?"

"Oh! yes, Aunt Cosy, *such* nice ones. We liked what you told us. Will you tell one now?"

for good qualities and sweet tempers, not for their fine clothes."

When Mabel heard that, she turned very red, and hung her head for several minutes, but as they drove on and on left the wood behind them, coming once more into the bright sunshine, all Mab's grave thoughts flew away and she forgot everything unpleasant in her delight at seeing some little moorhens swimming on a small stream near the road. At length the drive came to an end, and they all got out of the carriage in a beautiful wood. There was a delightful bank of moss and wild flowers, everything was so green, and smelt so sweet, and the day was as bright and warm as possible, so that no one ought to have been happier than Mabel.

Shawls were spread on the ground for the elder ones of the party to sit upon, and a nice sheltered corner was found for Aunt Ellen, who was afraid of catching cold; and then the children were told they might run about and play until dinner was ready.

"Come on," said Tom, "I'll tell you what we can do. Let us play at being Red Indians, and that we are out on a foraging expedition, getting food, you know."

All the children agreed that it would be a very nice game, and followed Tom as he led the way through the bushes, deeper into the wood. For a time, all went well, the children played happily, pretending they were Red Indians, and danced about in a very wonderful and delightful manner, "a war dance," Tom called it, which might even have astonished the Indians themselves, could they have seen it. But at length something happened which rather spoilt the pleasure of the party.



Silk.

PART I.

MABEL de Vere woke up one bright sunny morning and remembered that it was her birthday that she was now eight years old. At that age birthday is a great event, and Mabel's was always made a day and holiday.

The sun shone brightly in at her window, and she sprang up at once to look at him, but as he was so brilliant to be looked at, she dropped back on to her pillow and began thinking of all the delightful things that were to happen that day. First there would be her birthday party, she always had such delightful ones, and she remembered that a box which had arrived the night before, from her grandmamma, for Mrs. de Vere had sent it away as Mabel came into the room, but not that her child's quick eyes had seen it.

Then Mabel was to have a new frock, her mother had promised her one, and it was to be the prettiest that Mrs. de Vere could get. And last—but by no means

there was to be a picnic in a wood, about seven miles off, and five little cousins were to come to it. Mabel, I am sorry to say, was rather troublesome that morning while nurse was brushing her hair, and did not set her little sister Violet a very good example, which she ought to have done, particularly as she thought herself now two years older than Vi, who was only "six and three quarters."

But at last Mabel was dressed, and with a very happy face she went down to the breakfast room.

Yes, there were the presents piled up on her plate and on her chair, so with a cry of delight Mabel began hastily to examine them.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Mr. de Vere, "is this the way to behave on a birthday? I think, Mabel, another time, we shall have to keep our presents until you have said 'good morning' to mamma and me as you always do."

Mabel hung her head for a moment, then leaving the delightful brown paper parcel she was just untying, she went round and kissed her mamma and papa, wishing them both good morning.

"That is better," said Mr. de Vere; "good morning and many happy returns of the day to my little birthday girl. Why, what a lucky child you are! No one gives *me* so many presents on *my* birthday."

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried Mabel, as each new parcel was unfastened; "thank you—thank you *ever* so much! I seem to get nicer presents every year! I am sure this lovely doll is from grandmamma, and this book is from *papa*, he has written my name and his own inside! This darling little work-box is from you, mamma, and Vi—dear little Vi! has given me this paint-box. I have been

wanting a paint-box for ever so long ! Nurse's present *is* this nice pincushion, which is very pretty, and now I *shall* not lose my pins as I used to do. Mamma, I think *this* is the most delightful birthday I ever had ! I only hope that it will keep as nice all day long !"

"I hope it will," said Mrs. de Vere, "and in order that it may, I hope you will be very good and obedient all day."

"Yes, mamma, people are always good on their birthdays," answered Mabel.

Mabel could hardly eat any breakfast, she was so much excited, and she grew rather impatient, for it seemed to her as if every one else ate twice as much as they usually did.

At last Mrs. de Vere said that the children might go up to the nursery and play together, but warned them not to tire themselves, as then they would not enjoy the picnic, and their little cousins were to arrive at eleven o'clock.

Mab and Vi were very happy finding places for the new treasures in drawers, book-cases, and toy cupboards ; after which they played a very favourite game, which they called "punting."

This game was played by taking the cover of a very large, oval clothes-basket and laying it upon the floor, so that—to a childish mind—it looked something like a boat.

The children then sat inside (it was a very tight fit) and pushed themselves about with a walking-stick belonging to Mr. de Vere.

The boat did not move along very quickly, but the

always pretended it did, which satisfied them just

they were making a very dangerous voyage to call upon Uncle George, you know," Mabel told that there was a storm, which occasioned much trouble on board.

She herself into the sea, that is to say, jumped on top of green carpet, Mabel heroically followed her and for the next few minutes they plunged about about, as if swimming vigorously.

At the moment that the boat upset, Mrs. de Vere came on deck, followed by nurse who carried the new frock.

At the moment the shipwreck was over and the ship was drenched, while Mab and Vi came to look and admire. She wore a very pretty, pale blue frock, of very soft thin material, very simply and looking so fresh and childlike that no one who saw it, thought it the sweetest little frock she had ever seen.

She at once wished to try it on, and when she saw how it looked and how well it fitted, she did not at once take it off.

"No," she said, "mayn't I keep it on? I really like it, and it is so pretty, I want my cousins to see it. If I wear a pinafore it cannot be spoilt. Do not take it until they come, *do*, mamma, as it is my

dearest. I am afraid you may spoil it, if you are playing with it. That would be a great pity. You know you are so careless about your clothes; but as you are so anxious to wear it, perhaps this time you will



CHAPTER XV.

A BIRTHDAY PARTY. SUE MAKES A NEW FRIEND.

JUSTIN'S birthday dawns bright, clear and frosty—everything that a winter's day should be. There is much more excitement over the birthday at the Cottage than at the Park House, though Justin's presents are unusually splendid this year.

As they sit at breakfast, Justin says,

"Father, I want to put up a flag-staff at the end of the terrace, and clear away one or two of the trees, so that the Rutherfords can see it from their house. And then with a set of flags we can get up a code of our own. It will be great fun signalling, and will save heaps of time and trouble."

"How will they answer you?" asks Mr. Meadows; "I doubt if Dr. Rutherford will put a flag-staff either on his house or in the garden."

"Oh! we would manage about that. Rupert's room and Sue's room both look this way, and I could give them

of flags, and I'd get Thomas to fix a good stout for them to hoist the flags upon. I think we can manage it, if I may order the flags."

"Order what you like," answers his father, and Justin thanks him in silence.

At the Cottage, nine little packets are done up and directed with all possible care to "Justin Meadows, Esq.:" and there is much laughing over Paul and Sydney's packets, which are found to be addressed (unmistakably in Paul's writing) to "*Mr. Fustin Meadows, Esq.*"

Sue undertakes the care of Eve's little parcel, and even Aunt Cosy (who has been invited to the party, but has declined to go) sends her contribution.

When the eventful hour comes, the Meadows carriage appears at the door, and Sue, Floss and the little ones get in and drive away, feeling very grand and ladylike. Val is on the box, and Rupert has gone with his father in the chaise, as he is to be left at the Park before Dr. Rutherford goes to see a patient, living a little way farther.

Justin is in the hall to welcome his guests, and he surveys them with great satisfaction, for there is not a starched frock among them. They are the earliest visitors of the party, and have therefore leisure to look round the rooms and admire all Justin's new presents.

Sue feels, after seeing the splendid telescope and hearing of the new bicycle, that their little gifts must seem very mean and shabby, and she moves nervously away as she sees her packet in Justin's hand.

But she need not have been afraid, for the next moment Justin is at her side.

"Oh! Sue, how good of you! A cap just like Rupert's

and the book-marker. You have spent too much time on me!"

"Oh! no, the cap was made for you several days ago and you asked for the book-marker, you know. Do you like it?"

"Like it? Of course I do! Your hair looks like what-d'you-call-it silk."

"Floss silk? Oh! nonsense, but I am glad you like what I put. I did not know if you would care about it."

"'Justin, from Sister Sue,' why, what *could* you have said that I should like better? And the cap is charming. How does it look? Is it becoming? It fits like—like—like a cap!" and he adjusts it on his head, and looks at Sue for approval.

"You look," begins Sue, and then she laughs and colours as she adds, "but I won't make you vainer than you are!"

"No—don't!" retorts Justin mischievously; "only wonder that you could spend any time in making a cap for 'that horrid, cruel Meadows boy!'" Having said that Justin flees for his life.

Then other children arrive, and among them Ted, the owner of the broken steam engine; a small child with big head, large, watery blue eyes, and weak thin legs. He seems to be a great pet of Justin's, and to return the big boy's affection with a worship that seems to fill his whole soul. He follows Justin with his eyes, content when for a moment the other sees and smiles on him.

To most people, Ted is not an attractive child, and Sue at first wonders what, except pity, can make Justin care to have him there.

The following conversation, however, carried on, on one side in Ted's squeaky little voice, and on the other in Justin's gentlest tone, partly enlightens her.

"Oh! I say, Justin, the cog's broken again, and it *won't* work. I've tried to mend it, and I nearly did, but it made my head ache, and mother took it away."

"Send it over to me, Ted, and don't you fidget over it. I'll do it."

"But, Justin, I've been thinking about that engine, and I believe I could make it work better in another way, if I'd only the things to do it with. I drew it all out on a sheet of paper, only mother took it away and burnt it, and hid the pencil, but I could not help *thinking* about it, and that made my head ache worse than the drawing did."

"That is a pity, for you promised me you wouldn't think about the wheels any more, Ted. But next time you feel well enough, and your mother will let you come, just run over to me, and you shall draw the wheels, and I'll undertake to get them made, and we'll work the engine finely then."

Ted's eyes glitter, and he rubs his tiny thin hand up and down Justin's sleeve with a very confiding, caressing touch.

Justin's eyes at that moment meet Sue's, and he smiles.

"Here, Ted, come and talk to this young lady, she is a great friend of mine, and I am sure you will like her very much."

Ted looks rather unwilling and very shy, but he would sooner die of shyness than refuse any request of Justin's.

He moves slowly to Sue's side, and takes the vacant -
beside her, asking gravely,

"Do you understand mechanics?"

This question, uttered in his shrill baby treble, *almost* makes Sue laugh. It is fortunate that she *is* able to keep grave, for Ted's sensitive nature is keenly alive to all possible ridicule, so that for a moment, even the twinkle in Sue's eyes rather disconcerts him. But when Sue answers in her kindest tone,

"No, I'm afraid I don't," Ted is once more reassured, and says eagerly,

"Shall I tell you something about them?"

And Sue having said she would like to hear, Ted draws from his pocket a pencil and piece of paper, and begins rapidly to draw.

"Here, if you look at this, I can explain better. You see my engine is made with a wheel like this, a cog wheel, which moves that other wheel, so that when it is wound up, the two wheels moving together turn this little crank here, and the engine runs along so; do you understand?"

Sue looks in bewilderment at the neat little drawing before her of wheels, and then into the face of her small instructor.

"I am afraid I am very stupid!" she says gently, as Ted looks rather disheartened.

"Oh, well, never mind! I suppose I don't explain it properly, not as Justin would, because you see, I don't know a *great* deal about it myself. But I'll try to show you as Justin does. You see, this is A, and this is B. When A turns round, B must turn round also, and A and

B acting on C, move D and E, and so the engine runs along. That is easy enough *now*, isn't it?"

But fortunately for them both, Justin at that moment looks round and sees Sue's face.

"Ted," he says, laying his hand very gently on the boy's head, "look here, dear boy, I want you to forget your wheels and engines for a little while, in case you should get a headache, and that would spoil the fun. Shall I tell you what you are going to see presently?"

Ted looks up eagerly and nods, as he obediently pockets his paper and pencil.

"There is going to be a Christmas tree. You never saw one before, did you, Ted?"

"No, never!" answers the child, and wonders whether a Christmas tree *can* be nicer than his beloved wheels.

However, after that, Sue makes great friends with him, and at length coaxes him to join the game the other children are playing. Ted is so shy that he will only consent to play if Sue will promise always to keep near him, which she most good-naturedly does.

Eve has set her affections on dancing with Justin, and as soon as the room is clear, she takes possession of him, saying with decision,

"*Oo id doin' to dance wid me!*" and he is obliged to submit.

Sue dances with Ted, and tries to keep him happy and amused, Rupert is talking to Mr. Meadows in a corner of the room, while Mrs. Meadows and Dr. Rutherford stand together looking at the group of young ones before them.

"It was so good of you to let them all come!" says

Mrs. Meadows, "Justin had so set his heart on them to-day. I feel I cannot thank you properly for your kindness to my boy!"

"No, indeed, I am so delighted to have such a companion for Rupert."

"But you have all received him so kindly, just like of yourselves. Justin feels it very much, I can assure you, and particularly Sue's sympathy, and her affectionate disposition. He has hitherto been so much alone on his holidays, that I have almost felt he must be lonely at school."

"Justin is determined to repay tenfold any pleasure we may give him. My young ones would have had a sorry Christmas and New Year if he had not done much for them."

Mrs. Meadows gives a look of sorrow and sympathy for Dr. Rutherford's voice is very sad.

"Sue is a dear girl," she says presently, as if in consolation; "she will soon be of an age to be a real help with the younger ones. My husband is so delighted with her, she is so bright and so gentle. I could envy such a daughter as that!"

A fresh dance begins at that moment, and Dr. Rutherford notices that a change of partners has been effected. Ted and Eve dancing solemnly round in a corner by themselves, while Justin and Sue keep time to the music in a manner which is the envy and admiration of the others.

"There!" exclaims Justin, as he lands Sue laughing and panting at her father's side, "that is something dancing, isn't it, Sue?"

"Yes, indeed, it is," answers Sue, looking up into her father's face, and wondering why he is so very grave.

"Papa, dear, you look at me as if—as if you didn't like me to enjoy dancing," she says reproachfully.

"Yes, I do, my child," answers her father, smiling, and putting the hand she has laid on his arm; "but I was thinking that only yesterday, as it seems to me, you were a baby in my arms, and to-morrow, to carry out the metaphor, you will be a young lady, expecting to go to balls and have partners. I don't want to lose my *little Susy* too soon!"

"And you sha'nt, papa, for I shall always be 'little Susy' to you."

"If you keep your child's heart and your child's mind, Sue, but not else."

"Dr. Rutherford, after all this, I am almost afraid to remind you that I am dancing with Sue," says Justin, with an air of provoking meekness.

The doctor turns, and drops his daughter's hand which he has been holding; the next moment Sue and Justin have again joined the dancers.



CHAPTER XVI.

A CHRISTMAS TREE AND CHRISTMAS PRESENTS.

WHEN they have danced enough, Mrs. Meadows claps her hands, and calls out that tea is quite ready, and they all go into the dining-room, where there is much fun and laughter as to who can undertake to pour out tea.

Mr. Meadows says, that as it is Justin's party, *he* ought to take the head of the table, but after a moment's consideration, he puts Sue in the place of honour, and takes the seat at her side, next to Eve, and opposite Ted, who is still clinging to Sue for protection.

Sue is well skilled in the mysteries of tea-making, and acquits herself exceedingly well, giving the greatest satisfaction to all parties.

There are crackers enough when tea is over, to satisfy even Sydney's love of noise and fire, but poor Ted turns pale as each one goes off, and is finally driven from the tea-table by his terror of the explosions every time a cracker is pulled. Sue gives up her own fun to go with

until the others have finished their noisy play, and the rest of the party come into the drawing-room, and is sitting on Sue's lap, with his little thin arms round her neck, and his eyes fixed on her face, while she tells him one of her favourite fairy tales. The other children gather round to listen, and just as Sue has come to the end where "they lived very happily all the rest of their lives," Justin comes in to say that they are all to go down to the library.

Every one knows what *that* means, and they are all eager to be down first, so there is a rush among the younger members of the party; but when they come down stairs, Dr. Rutherford and Mrs. Meadows guard the door, and one by one the children are called and allowed to enter, so that there may be no confusion.

Yes, there it stands, the Christmas tree, blazing with candles, reflectors, toys and ribbons, and at the foot, the deep shelf is covered with big parcels, all done up in paper, some looking very heavy. There is a wire fastened across the room to prevent any of the little ones from venturing too near the tree, and over this Justin springs, calling to Val to come and help him. And then the work of destruction begins.

All the pretty things which have been tied on with such care, are ruthlessly snipped off with the scissors, until, in time, nothing is left but the candles and reflectors, and the Christmas tree is dismantled.

But we are going on too fast!

Val follows Justin, and Dr. Rutherford follows Val, and while they are at work on the tree, each child has a number put into his or her hand, and they are

told that everything with that number on it is meant for them.

Even Dr. Rutherford is made to take a number, though at first he rather indignantly declines.

"I am not yet in my second childhood, Justin! This game is for the children, not for me."

"But this number is yours!"

And so at length he takes it.

There is much laughter over calling out the numbers as the children come forward one by one to receive the toy allotted them. They are particularly delighted with some coloured eggs, which, having been emptied of their contents, and filled with sugar-plums, are painted, some red, some blue, while others have been made to look like funny faces.

And when the tree is stripped, and no more toys left upon it, Justin calls out that there is something more, and from the shelf below he hands to each of the assembled guests, a packet with their number on it.

"Yours is rather heavy, Dr. Rutherford," he says, with a twinkle in his eyes. "I hope you won't find any trouble in getting it home."

Dr. Rutherford touches the wooden box, whose brass handle is coming beyond the brown paper in which it is only half concealed.

"Justin," he says rather gravely, "I believe you are going to make me very angry with you. You have been throwing away your money on me!"

"I have nothing else to throw away!" says Justin with a laugh, and then Dr. Rutherford pulls away the paper, and sees—what he has coveted all his life, a handsome wooden case, containing a splendid microscope.

became of me, as he had expelled Ffrench, but Maskell began by saying that out of consideration for my father, he would not make a public example of me, and that Ffrench had spoken for me, so that he should only give me a heavy punishment, because the character of the school must be kept up. I—I don't know what I answered, I believe I was very impertinent, and told him what I thought about Ffrench, but he kept his temper, and sent me away before I'd hopelessly disgraced myself. It was kind of him, because, when I came to think it over, it would have been an awkward thing for father if I *had* been expelled; living here as we do, it could never have been kept quiet."

"Yes, it was fortunate that Maskell thought of that, or you'd have gone too. Have you heard from Ffrench since he left?"

"Yes. He went to a tutor's for a time, and he's going to Winchester when I do. I'm to spend a fortnight with him next summer."

"Well, you had a shave for it then," says Rupert leaning back in his chair, "for father mentioned in a letter to me, that you had very nearly been expelled from Maskell's. I'd like to abolish that Grammar school. They're such a set of cads!"

There is a thoughtful silence, Rupert's meditations are upon the possible destruction of the town school, Val's is more pacific, for he is planning his future career, in which Ffrench's companionship forms a prominent picture. He is occupied with thoughts of little Ted.

At length she says,

"You won't be unkind to Ted because he goes to

of a lovely, leather workbox, with silver fittings; the little boys have each the most beautiful toy that their fancy could have painted, and Eve is speechless with joy over a large French baby doll.

Every child of the party has something, and Justin's ears tingle with the many thanks he is obliged to receive.

"I don't understand it!" says Dr. Rutherford to Mr. Meadows, as they stand watching the others; "your boy has spent a fortune upon us. He must have ruined himself—why, this microscope alone—"

"Well, I'll tell you how it is," says Mrs. Meadows smiling, for there is no music sweeter to her ears than the praise of her boy; "some time ago his father promised Justin that this year he should have a sum of money to buy a horse and a trap for himself, and he was to have a groom to look after it. But a week ago he asked to be allowed to spend the money differently, and as his father said he might do what he liked, this is the result. He has done it *all* himself, and I am certain he is happier than he would have been if his father had given him the money, and it had cost him nothing. Justin *likes* giving up to others, and we are glad when he has such a good opportunity of doing so. The only present he hesitated over was Sue's. He was afraid you might not like his giving her a piece of jewellery, but he had set his heart on a gold bangle that he had once seen, and you must not scold him for having given it to her."

"It seems to me that in spite of Justin's giving up to others, he has a curious knack of getting his own way," says the doctor with a laugh. "You'll have to look after him by-and-by."

considerably shortened. What *will* she do when they are over?

Suddenly a voice asks, "Sue, do you *never* read?" and turning round, she finds Aunt Cosy sitting by the fire.

"Oh! have you been there all the time, auntie! I never saw you!"

"No, dear, I have just come in, and you did not hear me. But you have not answered my question yet, do you *never* read?"

"Yes—sometimes—not often. I like working better."

"Yes, so I see, and you work very well, but it is also important for a girl of your age to read too."

"Oh! but I *do* read, Aunt Cosy. I've read several books these holidays. I read the new 'Aunt Judy,' and I read 'Little Women,' and I read 'The Heir of Redclyffe,' and I am reading 'Misunderstood.'"

"And is that the *only* sort of reading there is, Sue? What have you done with the Histories, and the Biographies, and the Travels, and the Essays?"

"Oh! Aunt Cosy! But those are a sort of lessons—horrid books,—not for the holidays at all!"

"And are holidays to be spent only in pleasure or waste of time?"

Sue is silent.

"What will you do when your life is all so-called holidays? When you have finished with governesses and lessons, and have most of the day at your disposal, what do you mean to do then?"

"Oh! I dare say I shall read a great deal then—besides, I may get to like those sort of books—in time—older people do, it seems to me, and when I am older—"



CHAPTER XVII.

SCHOOL FEUDS.

THE eventful sixth of January is over, the Christmas tree looks dark and dreary with the guttering of candle and tawdry reflectors, pieces of ribbon forgotten cracker or two, as the morning light comes at the crack of the shutters. Such a white world outside! for in the night, soft, silent flakes of snow fallen, and are falling still, and the ground is white and dazzling.

"It will snow for some time, in all probability," says Dr. Rutherford, glancing at the leaden sky; "So you seem to have a cold, so you had better keep warm until it clears. I hope you have all recovered from the dissipation of last evening."

"Oh! yes, papa, I think so," answers Sue. "How nice it was, and what a pity it is over and cannot be again. Papa, do you know that little boy, Ted Williams? He is such an odd child, and so devoted to Justice."

"Yes, I have known Ted for five years. He has been one of my patients, poor little fellow! His father

clerk in the firm of Meadows Brothers, and when he died, Mr. Meadows brought the widow down here in the hope that country air would do Ted good. There are three other children besides Ted, and in spite of all the kindness she receives from Mr. Meadows and Justin, I am afraid Mrs. Williams has a hard time of it, for she is not a good manager."

"Is Ted very clever, father?" asks Val, looking up from his book.

"Very; and that, poor child, is his great difficulty. He has a tiny weak body, which is almost worn out by the ever-working brain. His mother does not understand quite how to manage him, and he is safer with Justin than any one, because Justin makes him understand the things he would otherwise puzzle over for hours, and he sees that when the poor boy's mind is bent in one direction, it is not only unwise, but cruel to endeavour forcibly to turn it into another channel. His mother thinks by taking away his pencils, burning his precious drawings, and treating him like a baby, that she can prevent his poor little mind from working, but instead of that, she only worries and snubs him, and does not understand why he looks sad, and still has headaches."

"I don't like that boy Ted," says Val decidedly, as his father leaves the room.

"Why not?" asks Sue a little hotly, for Justin's *protégé* must be defended.

"Oh, he's a Grammar school boy!"

"Ah!" says Rupert rather sarcastically, "that's quite enough reason for a Maskellite! How does the feud go on, Val? I haven't inquired about it these holidays."

"Oh, it's just the same as before. We met once in the term, and there was a jolly good row, I can tell you."

"Yes, indeed," says Sue, "if you call it '*jolly*' to come in covered with mud from head to foot. I didn't know him, Rupert; and he had a black eye for a week."

"Well, why not? I was rather proud of it, only Maskell expelled Ffrench, and he was the best friend I had in the school. It *was* a shame that! and only just because he stood up for Maskell. He and I were side by side all the time, and it was only that Ffrench called out 'Down with the Grammarians, boys, and three cheers for the Maskellites,' and then old Maskell said that he *led* the other boys. He didn't lead them, we all went to our own accord."

"Didn't he have *you* up about it?" asks Rupert.

"Of course he did. Ffrench went up first, I met him coming away. I shall never forget how he looked."

"Why? what did he say?" asks Rupert, with all the interest of an old Maskellite.

"He caught hold of my hand and said, 'He's done for me, Val, I'm to go—*expelled*! But I've done my best for you, and I hope it'll go smoother with you than me. And then he walked off to his room.' Here Val's voice begins to quiver.

Sue looks up; she has not heard these particulars before, and has rarely seen Valentine so much moved while Rupert brings his arms down on the table, saying in an excited tone,

"Go on, I never heard this part."

"Oh, there isn't much more to tell," says Val, after swallowing once or twice; "I didn't care much wh

became of me, as he had expelled Ffrench, but Maskell began by saying that out of consideration for my father, he would not make a public example of me, and that Ffrench had spoken for me, so that he should only give me a heavy punishment, because the character of the school must be kept up. I—I don't know what I answered, I believe I was very impertinent, and told him what I thought about Ffrench, but he kept his temper, and sent me away before I'd hopelessly disgraced myself. It was kind of him, because, when I came to think it over, it would have been an awkward thing for father if I *had* been expelled; living here as we do, it could never have been kept quiet."

"Yes, it was fortunate that Maskell thought of that, or you'd have gone too. Have you heard from Ffrench since he left?"

"Yes. He went to a tutor's for a time, and he's going to Winchester when I do. I'm to spend a fortnight with him next summer."

"Well, you had a shave for it then," says Rupert leaning back in his chair, "for father mentioned in a letter to me, that you had very nearly been expelled from Maskell's. I'd like to abolish that Grammar school. They're such a set of cads!"

There is a thoughtful silence, Rupert's meditations are upon the possible destruction of the town school, Val's are more pacific, for he is planning his future career, in which Ffrench's companionship forms a prominent picture. Sue is occupied with thoughts of little Ted.

At length she says,

"You won't be unkind to Ted because he goes to

the Grammar school, will you, Val? You'll be k and stand up for him if he should ever want it, w you?"

"Not I! Let the Grammarians look after their babies—we've enough to do to take care of Maskell's

"Oh! but Val, I *know* you would take that poor ch part if you found him in any difficulty. Justin said other day, that you had a soul which rebelled agz injustice of any kind."

"What rubbish!" says Val with a laugh, "Justin kr nothing about my soul, and I'm not going to promis stand up for any Grammar school brat, just because Jt has taken a fancy to him, and you've caught the c plaint."

"You'd *do* it all the same though!"

"No, I shouldn't!"

"Yes, you would!"

"No, I——"

At this moment a sudden and altogether unexpe gleam of sunshine shoots across the room, making snowy world outside sparkle like Sinbad's diamond va and fortunately cutting short the discussion.

Val springs up, almost overturning the table, and gi a yell of satisfaction, dashes out of the room, slamr the door. Rupert follows, only a trifle less noisily, Sue is left alone.

Sue has that kind of weary feeling which comes w a pleasure long looked forward to, is past. She feel this moment as if there was very little enjoyment le live for. The Christmas tree—Justin's birthday—New Year gifts—everything is over, and the holidays l

considerably shortened. What *will* she do when they are over?

Suddenly a voice asks, "Sue, do you *never* read?" and turning round, she finds Aunt Cosy sitting by the fire.

"Oh! have you been there all the time, auntie! I never saw you!"

"No, dear, I have just come in, and you did not hear me. But you have not answered my question yet, do you never read?"

"Yes—sometimes—not often. I like working better."

"Yes, so I see, and you work very well, but it is also important for a girl of your age to read too."

"Oh! but I *do* read, Aunt Cosy. I've read several books these holidays. I read the new 'Aunt Judy,' and I read 'Little Women,' and I read 'The Heir of Redclyffe,' and I am reading 'Misunderstood.'"

"And is that the *only* sort of reading there is, Sue? What have you done with the Histories, and the Biographies, and the Travels, and the Essays?"

"Oh! Aunt Cosy! But those are a sort of lessons—horrid books,—not for the holidays at all!"

"And are holidays to be spent only in pleasure or waste of time?"

Sue is silent.

"What will you do when your life is all so-called holidays? When you have finished with governesses and lessons, and have most of the day at your disposal, what do you mean to do then?"

"Oh! I dare say I shall read a great deal then—besides, I may get to like those sort of books—in time—older people do, it seems to me, and when I am older—"

"No, Sue, if you do not learn to read good books while you are young, you will not care for them when you are older. I have known many a woman of forty—fifty—seventy even, who would spend from morning till night over a novel, but who never touched a useful book. Perhaps she had not a tiresome Aunt Cosy to point out the danger of it in her youth, and to endeavour to direct her before it was too late!"

"Oh! Aunt Cosy, *dear* Aunt Cosy! Tell me what to read, and I'll begin it this very minute," and Sue kneels down at her aunt's feet, all love and submission, and feeling in her heart very grateful that she has a "tiresome Aunt Cosy."



CHAPTER XVIII.

SIX TO ONE.

THIS is an eventful day to many. The snow lies about six inches deep, and when the sun comes out, and shows the landscape in one glorious silver plain, broken only by the snow-covered houses and trees, there are few boys who are not tempted out.

Ted Williams is one of the first to leave home. He has been puzzling over his water-mill, his mother having refused to allow him the use of the jug and basin, which is necessary for his proposed scheme. If all the water were not ice, he could have tried his beloved toy at the stream, but there is no possibility of doing that, so taking the little machine with him, he sets off to consult Justin on the subject.

Alas for Ted! On his way he comes across a knot of boys who are lounging upon the bridge, staring at the snow-covered ice below, and thirsting for mischief of any kind.

Ted has no fear of them, they are Grammar school boys,

his own schoolfellows, and even were they Maskellites, he is sure they would leave him alone, and so he trots on complacently, until he is in the very midst of them, and then he is suddenly stopped.

"Come here, Goggle-eyes," says one of them, seizing him roughly by the arm in such a manner, as to jerk the mill from the boy's weak fingers into the snow. "What are you after? no good, I'll be bound!"

There is a shout of laughter as the others look at the meek little face, full of silent dismay and reproach.

"What's *this*?" picking up the mill.

"Mine," answers Ted, trying to keep brave, and steady his trembling lips.

"Box his ears for being impertinent!" calls one of them, and a hand is raised, when Ted suddenly cowers with terror, sobbing,

"Oh! don't, don't, it will make my head ache so awfully, and you don't know how bad it can be!" The hand drops, but only to give place to another form of cruelty.

"What's this machine?"

"A water-mill," sobs Ted, too frightened not to reply.

"Oh! a *water*-mill! Well, as there's no water just now, this isn't of much use to you, so we'll see how it's made. Here, Tom, catch hold of him;" for Ted makes a sudden, desperate, and hopeless endeavour to save his unlucky mill.

In a moment two of the boys seize him and he is powerless, and can only gasp with horror as he sees the wheels wrenched off, and the pretty toy dismembered.

The boys are all so busy in their cruel occupation, and



the thick snow deadens each footfall, that it is with a considerable start they hear an indignant voice in their midst.

"Let that child alone, and give him back his toy, or I'll make some of you repent it, as sure as my name's Valentine Rutherford!"

In their surprise they release Ted, who flies to Val for protection, gasping,

"Oh! never mind the water-mill! Let's run away."

But Val has the true British horror of running away, so he stands facing the boys, and finds they are six to one—for Ted does not count as anything but a hindrance.

"Run away!" he answers sharply, shaking Ted off, as the little fellow hangs on his arm, "not if it was the whole Grammar school!" and then they stand for a moment, each uncertain how to attack the other.

Val does not notice that Ted has considered discretion the better part of valour, and is running away as fast as his weak little legs can carry him, in the direction of the Park House. The other boys, occupied with watching Val's slightest movement, do not perceive Ted's desertion.

"Well—is it to be fair play, or foul?" asks Val, with rather too much scorn in his voice and manner.

A moment before, each of those six boys held his breath with admiration of Valentine's pluck, but his words make them angry, and with their anger, his last chance vanishes.

He has scarcely spoken before a snowball comes with sudden and blinding force against his face, and breaks, leaving him pale and savage.

"Oh! *that* is it, is it?" he says, and the battle begins in earnest.

It is a cruelly onesided affair. Val cannot, for all his courage, stand against six, in such a contest. He contents himself with dodging the snowballs as well as he can, and occasionally returning a well-planted one, but the battle is unequal from the first, and Val, too proud to make any truce with Grammarians, begins to wonder how it will end.

Alas! it is decided only too soon.

One ball—sent with unerring aim, seems to draw a line of sparks across his eyes, and the boys pause, for they see a change come over his face.

But even then Val dies game. He staggers slightly, puts his hand up to his temple, and withdraws it, covered with blood. Then, with a smile, which will linger in their minds longer than any words, he says slowly,

"Oh! a *stone!* *Cowards!*" and making a faint effort to preserve his balance, he falls back into the snow, which slowly reddens under his sunny hair.

"Who did that?" asks one of the boys indignantly with an uneasy look towards their prostrate enemy. "I didn't, I know that."

"No more did I!"

"Nor I!"

"Nor I!"

"Nor I!"

"Nor I!"

Yes, six deny it, but the boy who can do so mean an action, must be equally capable of telling a lie to screen himself.

Each boy looks with a suspicious glance at his neighbour, and they turn away, leaving Val lying where he has fallen, in the hope that Ted will return to the rescue and find him there.

But they do not get off quite so easily.

From one way comes Rupert as fast as his well-trained limbs will bring him, and from the other comes Justin. They have met Ted and heard his story, and have gone by different ways to prevent the possible escape of the culprits, and now they come upon them just when all is over.

There is a desperate *mêlée* for a moment, but even then Justin sees that one boy, when Rupert rushes at him, ducks, but does not return the blow, and though he does not fight *against*, he has not lifted his hand to defend himself or his companions.

In an instant Justin has him by the collar and drags him out from among the others, who, a moment later are put to flight, and there he stands, pale, silent, and a prisoner.

"Are you too great a coward even to defend yourself?" asks Justin in a withering tone.

He is very angry—more angry than Rupert has ever seen him, and as the boy looks into the two indignant faces before him, and sees their compressed lips and flashing eyes, he feels that there is not much to be hoped from their mercy.

He makes no answer to Justin's cutting words, only when his captor shifts his left hand instead of his right to the boy's collar, he says quickly,

"I won't run away."

"Oh dear no, of *course* not!" says Rupert ironically and Justin coldly ignores the remark, keeping his grasp as firmly on the collar as before.

"How are we to get him home?" asks Justin, as, to his great relief, Val sits up suddenly, and mechanically clears the clotted hair from his eyes.

"How are you, Val? Not very much hurt, I hope?"

"Oh! no—not much—only—" he passes his hand again across his eyes; "is it the snow that makes everything so white—like a great sheet before my face? What was the matter?"

"You've had a fight. Come, don't talk, Val, we want to get you home," says Rupert, in a miserably wretched cheerful sort of tone. "Can you stand if I give you an arm?"

"Oh, yes! Where are you? The snow must have fallen all into my eyes. A fight, you say—but I don't fight at least, not often. What was I fighting about? What were the others?"

"You were fighting for Ted. Oh! *don't* talk, Val. You must keep quiet, you know."

"But I want to understand—is Ted hurt? and how did he come here?"

"I can't answer any more, Val, you must keep quiet and come home. Here, take my arm, and we'll walk slowly as you like."

"Can you hold me on each side, you and Justin, then I shall get on all right?" then with a weak laugh, wishing the snow would melt so that I could see a little.

By this time the elder boys are both much alarmed by Val's speeches, and his apparent blindness, and then

Justin does not for an instant leave his hold of his prisoner's collar, he gives Val such help as he can with the other arm.

"Have either of you a handkerchief to lend me?" asks Val, after they have walked some little way.

Rupert plunges his hand into his pocket, and brings forth a black rag, once his handkerchief, but which he has used for such strange purposes, that it is not fit to offer Val. He flings it into the ditch with a groan of disgust.

Justin searches ; he has dropped his in the stable-yard, and by this time it has been torn to shreds by "Double" and "Quits," the two pointer puppies.

Then a most unexpected voice says, "Take mine," and Justin finds a clean one put into his hand by the boy whose collar he is holding.

Justin looks at him steadily for a moment, with a feeling of shame at his former roughness. Almost unconsciously he loosens his hold of the collar, mutters his thanks, and gathering some clean snow, binds it firmly on to Val's forehead.

Justin and Rupert exchange glances as the boy continues to follow them, although the former has made no farther attempt to detain him ; but now he turns to him and asks with some interest,

"What is your name?"

"Jack Hartley."

"Did *you* throw the snowball that did this?"

"What? one with a stone in it? No, of course I didn't! I shouldn't have come with you if I had done such a mean thing. Why, if I'd struggled you *must* have

let me go, because you had to help him, and I could have kicked too."

"Yes, so you could. If I had known you better, should have trusted you," answers Justin more respectfully, for the boy's words he feels are true.

"Where do you live, Hartley?"

"Up in the town. My father is head clerk at the Bank."

"Well, will you come with us to Dr. Rutherford's? You are the only one who can tell what has happened, and I know the doctor won't be hard on you, he never is."

"No, I know that, but I'd rather not see him, only I suppose I must," and the poor boy sighs.

"Why don't you wish to see my father?" asks Rupert, now interested in this strange boy.

"Because he was very kind to me once, when I was ill, and—and—" he says no more and the others do not ask.

Val walks on mechanically while the two lead him, and he occasionally makes a drowsy remark about the snow. He seems to be inclined to sleep, and several times inquires wearily if they will *never* get home.

At length the four boys reach the Cottage porch, and without a word Justin opens the door, and beckoning to the others to follow, silently leads them up to Val's bedroom.

When there, Val drops on to his pillow and lies still, so still that Rupert begins to get very much alarmed and goes off to find where his father has gone, hoping, perhaps, to catch him in the town.

Justin goes down for a basin full of snow, with which he keeps the bandage on Val's forehead wet, and Jack Hartley with a very sober face watches him.



CHAPTER XIX.

ANXIETY.

MRS. Turrell and Sue have been out for a short walk, the day having turned out so much finer than was expected, and on their return they find Rachel in tears, a strange boy in the dining-room, Justin with a white face, wandering about in the hall, and they are told that Rupert and his father are upstairs with Val, who has already been put to bed. The house is to be kept very quiet, and Sue starts nervously as Phyllis's shrill baby laughter sounds from the nursery.

"How did it all happen?" she asks, as Mrs. Turrell goes to take off her bonnet and cloak and join her brother in Val's room, knowing well that he will want her help.

Sue is sitting on a bench in the hall, looking so miserable that Justin can hardly look at her, the expression of her face makes his throat ache in a very strange way.

"Come into the dining-room and ask Jack Hartley. He will tell you all about it. He was there."

Sue goes into the dining-room, and Justin follows, but

the moment she faces Jack Hartley, she gives a little start and draws back, while the boy flushes and hangs his head. Justin looks on in silent surprise.

"It was *you*," says Sue, addressing Jack, "who struck a match the other night, when we met you and some other boys in the lane. I saw you for a moment as you held the light in my brother's face."

"Yes," answers Jack, "I know—I did it."

To such a reply, Sue does not know well what to say. The boy's manner is subdued and sad, and it is impossible to be as indignant with him as she would like to be.

"Then why are you here?" she asks, and Jack only replies by pointing to Justin, who says shortly,

"I brought him. Some one must tell the doctor how it happened."

At this moment the door opens and Dr. Rutherford comes into the room. He is a little pale—for the sight of Val, stupid and heavy-eyed, has been a shock, and he is anxious about the boy. On seeing Jack Hartley, his usual kindliness and thoughtfulness for others return, and he holds out his hand, saying,

"Ah! Hartley, I am glad to see you again. I suppose you helped to bring my poor boy home, I am very much obliged to you."

But to his surprise Jack does not take the extended hand, he turns away sharply and dropping on to a chair puts his arms on the table and hides his face in them.

Dr. Rutherford lays a hand on his shoulder, and feels the boy's whole frame shaking with suppressed sobs; then motioning to Sue and Justin to leave them, he remains alone with the culprit.

"The door has closed and all is quiet, the doctor
forward, and says very low,

"I have something to tell me, Jack."

how hard it is to make that confession; to tell
a gentle, sympathetic, all-forgiving man, how his son
was treated among the boys, how mean, cruel and
unfair they have been!

Rutherford does not speak for some moments after
as he faltered out all the sad story, perhaps he is
afraid of saying too much, and making the boy's repent-
ance turn to hardened indifference. But when he does
speak! how much rather would Jack Hartley have
received the severest flogging than have heard those low

"I will not say a word of reproach to you, Jack, be-
cause your punishment is already a hard one, and may
be harder—if—if all does not go well with Val. But
I will give you one of advice. You see what trouble
company and idleness can lead you into. Will you
promise me that for the future you will keep clear of
them—boys—that you will have nothing more to say to
them than to be civil when you meet? I do not wish
to quarrel with them, or to show any anger or resent-
ment, but keep as much as possible out of their society,
and you will be better and happier than you have hitherto
been. Will you do this when I ask you?"

"Jack lifts his head and says bitterly,
"When I was ill, three months ago, I promised you I
never smoke again until I was past twenty. I
broke that promise before I had been well a month. Can
you believe me if I promise anything now?"

"Yes, why not? Besides, if you keep away from the boys, you will not be tempted to smoke. You will keep your promise this time."

"I'll try!" answers Jack with a long breath, and then Dr. Rutherford rises, and the boy follows his example.

"Now I must see how Val is before I go out to my other patients. Good-bye, Jack; I will see you again in a few days, and I shall hope to hear a good account of you."

Jack and Dr. Rutherford shake hands, and the boy goes out from the house with the determination to keep his promise this time through thick and thin.

And it may be a satisfaction to the reader to know that he *does*.

When Dr. Rutherford comes into Val's room, he finds him looking more comfortable, but still very drowsy, only speaking when spoken to, and taking no notice of what passes in the room.

Before Dr. Rutherford has left home, a message comes from Mrs. Williams, asking him to come and see Ted and also begging that if Justin is not too busy, he will come also, as Ted is asking for him incessantly.

Justin at once prepares to accompany the doctor, and as Val is to be left perfectly quiet in his darkened room with only Aunt Cosy to watch him, Rupert, Sue, and Floss assemble in the drawing-room by the fire, to talk over the events of the morning, until Rachel softly comes in to tell them dinner is ready.

Then Sue steals up to Val's room, and begs Aunt Cosy to go down, because of the little ones, and she will wait with Val until her aunt's return. Mrs. Turrell consents immediately, as she knows it will be a harder task for Su-

the little ones quiet and contented, and so the
 left to watch in Val's room.

fire which has been lighted suddenly crackles and
 up, when, to Sue's dismay, Val opens his eyes and
 over.

looks at her steadily for a moment, and then says,
 "Hello! Sue, what are you doing?"

"Nothing, dear. The fire woke you, I suppose."

"The fire? oh! what time is it?"

"About half-past one."

"Half-past one! Oh! but then—how very odd! How
 can I be here? I've been dreaming, I suppose. Well,
 I must get up."

"But, Val, dear, you must lie still," says Sue, coming to
 him, and putting her gentle hand on his wrist; "you
 are hurt, and father wishes you to keep very quiet."
 Val lies back, for his head is aching, and he knits his
 brow with the effort of trying to remember something.

"I've been dreaming, I suppose," he says in a puzzled

"I thought I was walking with Rupert and Justin,
 there was nothing but snow, and it got into my eyes,
 and everything looked white. We seemed to walk
 for so long, and then I suppose I woke up."

Father's lesson is not thrown away on Sue now.
 She does not worry Val by telling him to be silent and
 still, she merely says,

"You were not dreaming, dear, you had to walk home
 alone after you were hurt, hurt by those boys with a
 stick. You had been so brave in defending Ted!"

"Oh! ah! I remember now," says Val, and he lies
 perfectly satisfied now that the blank in his mind

has been explained. Presently he asks, "What became of Ted?"

"Oh! he ran home," says Sue, feeling that on account must Val learn that Dr. Rutherford has been for to see the boy.

"Those fellows didn't hurt him?"

"Oh, no! they did not touch him," replies Sue. Val is satisfied, and presently his sister is rejoiced to his regular breathing, and on looking at him, she is sound asleep.

It is with this good news that Sue meets her when he returns home an hour later, and he smiles kisses the bright eager face that is turned up to him in spite of her glad tidings, the doctor looks grave enters the house. His anxious look recalls Sue, and asks hastily,

"How is Ted?"

"Very bad, I am afraid. I left Justin with him because he really seemed able to keep the poor child. He has had a terrible fright, and his poor, weak, worked brain has given way under it. I am afraid bad case."

Sue is very sorry for Ted, very sorry for Justin will be so grieved, but she cannot help feeling happier than she did in the morning, for is not Val better? and Val has become a hero in Sue's loving

She hangs round her father and follows him on to Val's door, until she hears his gentle, cheery "Well, my boy, you're getting on all right, I see; then she ventures in, knowing that Val is awake.

Yes, and not only awake, but he lies there quiet

ed, his mind is clear, and he thinks he would like
ng to eat.

tears *will* come into his eyes as he looks at his
face, and reads the relief and thankfulness there,
can only smile, when Sue and Floss bring him
in of soup and the crisp piece of toast, and wait
as if he were something very precious that they
the risk of losing.

makes harum-scarum Valentine rather thoughtful
he finds how deeply all the family have felt for him,
ere is no need to insist on his keeping quiet for
t of the day.

ies propped up with pillows, the cut on his temple
ed and bandaged, and Sue sits beside him most of
e, amusing him as best she can. Aunt Cosy and
pay him a visit when twilight is creeping over the
and he begs Aunt Cosy to tell him something,
ig, he is ready to listen to whatever she has to tell.
ell," says Aunt Cosy, "I had promised to read
another story, but if you like to listen, I will read it
instead of downstairs."

hat's just the thing," says Val brightening at once,
u'd just give this pillow a tug, Sue—yes, so; now
d listen for hours."

at I don't know whether you will care for my stories,
hey are all about girls."

! I never mind, Aunt Cosy. I dare say they're
ough. Fire away!"

saucy boy. Well, I will begin. The other story
was called 'Silk.' The one I am going to read
ow is called 'Satin.' "



Satin.

PART I.

THERE was, once upon a time, a little girl who was always dressed in satin.

She was a little Italian princess, her name was Stella, (which in Italian means star) and she was eleven years old.

Stella lived in a beautiful palace, she had everything she could wish for, toys and sugar-plums, birds and dogs, servants to wait on her, and a little black page to follow her about, to pick up her delicate lace handkerchief if it fell, or carry a parasol over her if she felt the sun too hot.

She was always beautifully dressed in very bright colours, such as suited her jet black hair, sparkling dark eyes, and clear olive skin. She was a pretty child, but she cared nothing about that; she was even tired of hearing her nurse say how lovely she looked, and as for her dresses, she only thought them very tiresome to wear.

There were a great many things that Stella would have liked to do, but which her governess told her were either very naughty, or not at all the way a princess ought to behave.

She sometimes longed to take off her dainty embroidered shoes, with their high heels, and dip her little feet in the marble basin into which the fountain in the courtyard fell with such a pleasant murmur.

She had once ventured to take off one shoe, and was just feeling how fresh and cool the water was, when her governess found her, and was so shocked at the sight, that with many blushes and tears, Stella promised never to do such a dreadful thing again. Another ungratified wish that this poor little princess had, was that she might sometimes be allowed to walk outside the courtyard. She got so weary of the marble basin, the tinkling sound of the fountain, of the broad steps and the high walls.

She longed to run into the street and see what was doing outside, watch the people who passed up and down, and the little children who played in the gutters. Stella thought she should like to talk to them, and play games as they did.

But when she suggested this one day to her governess, that wise lady was again so shocked that Stella once more blushed and was silent.

Every afternoon she went for a drive through the beautiful city, in a grand carriage with her nurse and governess, and while they talked of things she did not understand, she used to look with eager curious eyes at the poor people who worked or begged, and wonder about them in silence, she was afraid to ask her governess anything now, for fear she should be shocked again.

And the poor people who saw her in her grand carriage as she passed, said to themselves or their neighbours, "There goes that proud little thing, Princess Stella."

It happened one day that the carriage was standing outside the door of a confectioner's shop where Stella had been having some ice, for the day was very hot; as the little princess passed to her carriage with a cake in her hand, a poor woman cried out to her that she was starving and wanted some bread.

Stella stopped to look at her, and again the woman said she had eaten nothing for many hours, and wanted food.

"Why do you not go in there, then?" asked Stella, pointing to the shop, and the woman answered that she had no money; so Stella, looking with wonder at such an extraordinary person, at once handed her the cake she held.

The woman took it eagerly, and began to thank her, but the next moment the governess ran up, dreadfully shocked at the idea of a princess speaking to a beggar, and hurried Stella into the carriage.

That incident made a great impression upon the child's mind, and she questioned her father and mother about it, when she was next with them.

They were sitting under some orange trees, drinking iced water, and eating figs and grapes, when Stella suddenly asked why some people were poor and wanted money, when others were so rich and could give it to them.

Her father laughed, and told her not to trouble her little head about such matters; that all she had to do was to be happy and good, and mind what her parents and governess told her.

"But my father, she said she was starving—I asked Pedro," (Pedro was the little black page) "and he told

me that it means having no food, and being very hungry, and that must be very dreadful indeed," said little Stella gravely. "How can I be happy when people have not enough to eat in this city, and why do I not give food to this woman, my father, for I have often a great deal more than I want?"

The Prince shrugged his shoulders, and glanced at the Princess, who told Stella not to talk of what she could not understand.

Stella was glad they were not shocked, but she wished they had answered her and explained something about it, because she *wanted* to understand, and the thought of the poor woman starving, troubled her very much.

One day, when Stella was playing with one of her coloured balls in the outer courtyard, the ball flew over the wall and into the street. A number of little boys seized it, but they did not bring it back, they kept it, and even when Stella sent the little black page to fetch it, they would not give it up.

Stella wondered why they wanted *her* ball, and was sorry, for it was her favourite of them all.

When the little black page came back, he was very angry, and called the boys "thieves," which made Stella still more sorry, and she said, if she gave them the ball, perhaps they would not be "thieves" any more, and she wondered what "thieves" were, for, from Pedro's tone, she felt sure they were something very dreadful. That evening she asked her father what thieves were, and he laughed, as he did at all her questions, and said, "Stewards and Ministers." Then Stella wondered why the little black page should have called the boys "Stewards and Minis-

ters," for they did not look at all like the grave gentlemen who were the ministers she knew, or like Signor Fiasco, her father's steward.

When she said this, the Prince only laughed louder than before, while the Princess lifted her eyebrows, and wondered where the child could pick up such fancies.

At last a strange thing happened to little Stella. A fire broke out in some part of the city, and every one was in a state of the greatest excitement.

The Prince ordered his horse, that he might ride to the spot, the Princess wished to drive to the nearest safe point of view, all the household were running about, asking each other where the fire was, if it could be seen from the palace, from the tower, or from any place near.

The palace gates were left wide open, and as Stella's governess was as excited as the rest, she did not see that while she was listening to a long account of the fire, the child had slipped outside the gates, and was running as fast as she could down the street.

No one noticed her, for all the people were rushing to see the fire, but as she went on farther still, she came to a poor, miserable little hovel, and at the door stood the very woman who had begged of her not many days before.

PART II.

Stella stopped to look at the poor woman, and then holding out her hand said,

"I am so glad I have found you! I have been wanting to see you and ask you a great many things; only—you won't be shocked?"

"Shocked!" echoed the woman in surprise.

"Yes, you promise not to be? My governess is so ten shocked at what I say, but *you* won't be, will you? want to ask you how it is that you are hungry and want oney?"

"Because I am poor," answered the woman, almost silling; "I have been very ill lately, and not able to m any money," and she looked with greedy eyes at the Princess Stella's lovely crimson satin tunic and lden girdle, at the ear-rings in her ears, and the gold oss that hung on a chain round her neck.

"May I go into your house and rest?" asked Stella; I am so tired, for I have not often run so fast. Besides, want to see where you live."

"My little girl is ill," said the woman, hesitating, "and do not know whether I ought to let you come in. The ince and Princess will be sending people to look for , and I shall get into trouble."

"Oh, no!" said Stella quietly; "I will tell them about

Let me go in and rest. I will not be troublesome, l I want to see what such a funny place looks like in-. Let me go in, please."

to the woman allowed Stella to pass in, and when re, the child stood still in astonishment.

There were no pretty tables or chairs, no pictures on walls, no sofas, no carpets, or rugs, or curtains, no l fountain or marble basins, in fact, none of the gs which little Stella thought were really necessary to

What Stella saw was a dirty, muddy floor, a tiny broken dow that let in no light, and little air, a heap of rags

in a corner, bare walls and a cracked ceiling ; the room had a stuffy, unpleasant smell, and that was all !

Stella turned to the woman, and the tears of disappointment were standing in her eyes, as she asked,

"Where is your *other* room? Is all your furniture *there*?"

"This is our only room, little lady," replied the woman, and pointing to the heap of rags in the corner, she added,

"That is our bed, and there lies my little girl."

"*That!*" cried Stella, "why, it is only a heap of rags! Have you no nice soft bed, with sheets and blankets and a beautiful silk coverlet like mine? Oh! you poor, poor people, what can I do for you! But I have no money and nothing to give you—oh! yes, I have!" and she took the long gold ear-rings from her ears and laid them in the woman's hand. "I can give you these, for they are my very own. Will they be of any use to you?"

The woman thanked her again and again, and the little girl who was lying on the bundle of rags clapped her thin hands for joy, saying,

"Now we shall have some nice soup!"

Suddenly there was a knock at the door, and the face of the little black page appeared, asking for Princess Stella.

Pedro had run after Stella as fast as he could, and seeing her go into the poor woman's cottage, had gone back to tell the governess where she was, when he had met the Prince on horseback, returning another way from the fire.

The little black page at once told him where his young mistress was, and the Prince had come to fetch her him-

self, and was waiting outside on his horse, to take his little daughter home.

The poor woman kissed Stella's hand, and blessed her for her kindness, then the Prince gave her a piece of gold money, and lifting Stella into the saddle before him, he rode away.

Stella was much excited by all she had seen and heard, and made her father promise to help the poor woman and her sick child. When they arrived at the palace gates, there stood the Princess wringing her hands, crying, and scolding the governess for not taking better care of the child. Stella never remembered seeing her mother so agitated as when she came running to meet her little girl.

Indeed, every one was so delighted to see Stella safe home again, that she did not get the scolding she deserved for running away, and doing what she knew she ought not to do. As she lay down in her nice, soft bed that night, she thought of the sick child on her heap of rags, and the poor mother, and hoped that they would soon become rich and happy.

But Stella was not to escape without any punishment for her disobedience. A few days after her visit to the poor woman, she began to feel listless and tired, her head and limbs ached, and nothing seemed to amuse her, though the little black page played all his antics that she generally liked. The next morning she was feverish, and before night the little princess was very ill indeed, for she had caught a fever from the poor woman's child.

All the greatest doctors in the city came to see her, but she did not know they were there, for she was tossing

about, talking nonsense sometimes, and now ~~and~~ ^{the} she would ask questions about the little street ~~children~~ and then beg with tears that no one would be shocked.

The Princess sat by Stella's bedside for many hours during the day and night, her nurse and governess hardly ever left her, and the little black page was always standing outside the door, to carry messages, or fetch anything that was wanted, and he even slept on the mat outside he was so anxious to do what he could for his dear little princess.

The Prince often came and bent over his little girl, and he would call her softly by her name, while Stella's black eyes would look at him for a minute before she hid her face in the pillow, but she never knew him, and always begged that he would go away.

All her long black hair was cut off, and her little, pale thin face looked quite changed, so that every one was afraid she would die.

The pretty, bright-coloured satin dresses hung in the big cupboard, and her balls were lying in a corner where she had left them, even the splash of the fountain had mournful ring, as it fell into the white marble basin in the courtyard.

At last, one night when the Prince came in to look at Stella, he thought she was asleep, but as he bent down to kiss her, she opened her eyes and said in a whisper,

"My father, you won't be shocked?"

"No, no! my darling. What is it?" he asked, taking her little hot hand in his.

"I want that poor woman's little girl to come and live with me. May she, my father?"

"Get strong and well first," said the Prince, "we will see about it. Now go to sleep, my

daughter, as she was told.

One day, the little princess grew better, until at last she was carried down into the courtyard, and allowed to sit in a place that was cool and shady, comfortably propped up by cushions, the little black page performing all the duties to show his delight at seeing her again. A few minutes later, a little girl was brought to Stella, prettily in a bright-coloured peasant's dress, the little sick child she had seen lying on rags, but who was now to be the princess's playmate and play with her.

The mother, who was a widow, was allowed to remain in the palace as a servant, and she was in charge of her little girl, whose name was Tessa. She was very happy now, and the children had devoted themselves to the coloured balls in the courtyard. Stella danced gaily into its marble basin, and the music sounded, for it seemed to her like the echo of a song, which was a very merry one. But there was a wish of Stella's unfulfilled, and at first she was not allowed to ask her father: however, as she grew bolder too, and one day she whispered to her mother that she wanted a sum of money to be given by her father to the poor of the city. She wished that it might be a great sum, and given away on the steps of the great temple as a thank-offering for her recovery.

Her mother (who never laughed at her questions now) would not see about it, and in a short time all was

arranged. One Sunday morning, Stella, dressed in the most beautiful satin dress, with Tessa at her side, the Prince and Princess behind her, stood on the steps of the great church, and herself gave away loaves of bread and money to the poor, who came in crowds to receive it.

Every month this custom was kept up, only Stella did not give it away herself oftener than once a year, which day was always made a great festival and holiday among the people.

For the people all learnt to bless little Princess Stella's name, and if you could find that city in Italy, you would hear her praised to this day, and find that the poor have not forgotten her yet.



CHAPTER XX.

A PASSING SHADOW.

MR. Rutherford visits Ted again that evening, and finds him rather quieter. Justin has been with him until it is time to go home to dinner, and when he comes, he promises to come and see him again early in morning. And so for several days, Justin divides his time between the two sick rooms, acting a very different part in each.

With Val, Justin is all fun and laughter, for the former knows well enough to enjoy all the absurd stories that Ted picks up for his benefit. But with Ted it is very different. The busy, hard-worked brain requires rest and quiet, and to Ted's way of thinking, no one can administer this as well as Justin.

The wheels, which have been the child's delight, are now his chief torment, for he imagines them grown to an enormous size, and always turning and twisting before him. No hand can make them stop as well as Justin's, and no voice can silence their whirr as well as his, though

there are times when even Justin is unable to find comfort, and when fever and weakness fight together for poor little Ted's life.

Every day since the snowballing, Jack Hartley has been to the Cottage to ask after Val, and to the little street in the town to ask after Ted. Once Val has come up into his room, and they shake hands, Val with a slight feeling of condescension at taking so much notice of a Grammar school boy, and a pleasant consciousness of forgiving an enemy and showing great magnanimity thereby.

For the time being, Val is the family hero, and looks over his sisters in true masculine style, and even (in a few days) over Rupert himself, the elder boy receiving in his admiration of his brother's courage and generosity in taking Ted's part, against such overwhelming odds. When Val rejoins his family, after a few days' absence in his room, he is not a little proud of all the petting he has received, holds his head an inch higher, he walks through the town, and is more scornful than ever towards the unlucky Grammarians.

But poor Ted gets no better. Day after day the wheel turns and twist before him, and he hears them grinding all night long. On the fifth day of his illness when Dr. Rutherford comes to see him, he finds Justin there, and pauses on the threshold as he hears the words, "And then she came running down stairs, and asked me how you were, and when I told her, she gave me this for you. How do you like it?" It is a rough sketch copied from a print, of a child's head. The golden hair is low on the forehead, the blue eyes are wide open

, the red lips—as red as Sue’s paint-box can make
re parted in a very childlike manner, as if the
: had just laughed, and had not yet become quite
nd the tiny teeth are as white as the paper.
ives a cry of delight.

how pretty! Did she send it to me? That
!! Will you put it up there, on the wall where I
it all the time?”

When Dr. Rutherford comes forward into the
: recognises one of Sue’s attempts in water colour.
: was a good idea of Sue’s,” thinks the doctor,
s ready to congratulate his little patient on his
ture, and invents a short story instantly, to
for the child’s laughter.

stems and smiles in answer, and as Dr. Ruther-
ing away, he says eagerly,

you ask her to come and see me to-morrow?”

om do you mean, Ted?”

oints to the picture with his thin finger, and looks
doctor’s face.

”

please. I am sure she will come.”

’ well, I will tell her.”

ants no other company that day, his picture is
or him, and the wheels are forgotten for a time
ildish laughter he almost thinks he hears.

ext day Sue, comes to see him.

: much touched at the sight of his big, watery
l wasted little figure, and for a few minutes she
very difficult to say anything to him without
ut Sue is much braver now than she was a few

weeks ago, and she conquers her tears after a moment and makes Ted very happy by all she says to him.

Every one who sees much of Ted grows fond of him; he is a particularly interesting child, though he has no beauty to attract those who do not know him. He is very patient and very gentle, and one day when he hears that Jack Hartley has been to ask after him, he says anxiously,

"Justin, go down and tell him that it's not their fault that I'm ill—it's because I was so silly and got frightened that's all, and they couldn't help *that*, you know."

Justin gives this message to Jack Hartley, and Jack is more grieved than ever at having terrified the child, who now invents excuses for his tormentors.

But Ted does not get better, and Dr. Rutherford speaks more gravely of his illness.

The next time Sue goes to see him, he cannot talk, he only looks at her and smiles a little, and at last, when she bends over him to say good-bye, he keeps her hand for a moment tight in his. Something in the wistful eye goes straight to Sue's heart, and stooping over him, she kisses the white, damp forehead, and leaves him very contented and happy. Next morning, at breakfast, Dr. Rutherford tells them that little Ted's troubles are over. Very quietly, very suddenly, during the night, he had fallen into that sleep which has no waking on this side of the grave.

Sue sheds some tears, it seems so hard to think that there is no Ted, nothing that can know her and answer to her voice, and she wonders if Justin will be very miserable about his little pet. But when Justin comes

the Cottage that morning, except that he is a little subdued and quiet, Sue can find no change in him. He has bought a portfolio of Ted's drawings which the child wished him to have, and he and Sue spend the morning looking through them.

Very quaint, very impossible most of them are, and yet showing a talent very rare in a boy of under ten years of age.

When Sue, emboldened by his frankness, asks Justin why he does not seem more sorry about Ted, he answers smiling,

"Because I used to feel so sorry about him when he had those dreadful headaches, and suffered such pain. He always minded my going back to school so much, and I think the boys often teased him, and he was very shy of them. Now, I feel he is so very *safe*, nothing can ever hurt him again, and his poor little brain cannot be overworked *there*. I cannot feel sorry about Ted, Sue, for it could only be selfishness to wish him back again. Dr. Rutherford always said he would never live to become a man, and he might have suffered so much more!"

"But all sorrow of that kind is selfish, isn't it?" says Sue, "only, I don't see how people can help it."

"No, because we can't help feeling for ourselves, and I don't see that it can be wrong to do so. If I lost—any one very dear to me—I might not wish to have them back again to suffer, but I should grieve that I had lost a dear friend, or adviser, or comforter, and I should be *right* in grieving—that I am certain of—or what is the good of love and friendship if we are not to be sorry *when* we lose them? But I can't feel, that losing poor

Ted has been such a grief as losing any of my own relations, or Rupert—or *you*."

And Sue answers him with a very bright, sisterly smile.

Four days later, little Ted is buried in the old churchyard outside the town, and the snow has to be cleared away before the small grave can be dug. A great many of the schoolboys who live in the town, ask to be allowed to attend the funeral, and among those who go are Justin, Rupert, Val, and Jack Hartley.

The day after the funeral, a thaw sets in, and the roads become rivers of mud. Val has been out alone, no one knows where. The events of the last week have made a deep impression on him, and he has lost the somewhat haughty and overbearing manner, which his late exploit and subsequent petting had brought to light. He no longer torments Floss by upsetting her workbox, carrying off her pencils, and pulling her tidy curls; he does not even annoy Sue with his contradictions and long arguments, which she *feels* are wrong, but is unable to refute, and he is more sociable and ready to follow Rupert, than anxious to stand alone. But to-day he has been out for hours alone in the muddy lanes, and no one knows what has become of him, until, as dusk creeps over the sky and into the houses, Sue hears him come in, and goes to meet him.

Val is covered with mud—his boots look as if they had been soaking for a week in a ditch, his hands are black, and his face has strange streaks upon it, but his eyes are shining with a glitter which—if it were any one but Val—would suggest tears to Sue.

"Oh, there you are!" she says.

"es, here I am," and Val begins to tug at the laces of his boots.

"Where have you been?" asks his sister.

"Walking up and down. It's precious dirty in the

Look at that!" and he holds up a boot from which mud is hastily retreating.

" Dreadful!" she says with sympathy, "but why need you have got so dirty? Rupert and Justin have been in the mud out several times, and they hadn't *half* the mud on their boots that you have."

"They didn't go where I did then."

"But where *did* you go?" and Sue wonders still more. "What does she see something tied up in his handkerchief."

"What have you got there?"

At last Val picks it up hastily and scampers up-stairs in a hurry, leaving the muddy boots in the hall.

He then calls Rachel and asks her to take them away, at which that handmaid exclaims rather indignantly,

"Well, I never! What *will* Master Valentine be doing

Bringing half the mud of the parish into a clean house like this! Upon my word!" and she carries off the boots, grumbling all the way.

She does not mind Rachel's scoldings, for she knows well enough that if it were for the children's good, she would lay down her life to serve them, though she would not do it out beforehand in many complaints and grumblings. Sue sees no more of Val until tea-time, when he comes in, cleans himself clean and tidy, and makes no answer to her chaff about his muddy walk.

But Sue knows there has been some real reason for his absence, and later in the evening she hears it.



CHAPTER XXI.

VAL IN A NEW LIGHT.

RUPERT has gone to his room to tidy (his drawers, in the hope of thereby find mislaid treasures ; Floss is sitting in her usual place ; Aunt Cosy ; Paul and Sydney are lying side the rug, their picture-book spread out between them ; Eve is in " my Tothy plathe !" as she calls it. Dr. Rutherford has not yet come in.

" I say, Sue," says Val, suddenly opening the door, " could you come here a minute ?"

For a moment, Sue feels inclined to say " No," but she has just reached the most interesting part of her story, and she looks up rather doubtfully.

" *Do!*" says Val, pleadingly, and Sue goes.

She is glad she has done as he asked her, for at that moment Val opens the dining-room door, and

" Come in here. I want to show you what I have to-day. I had *such* a hunt for it !"

And then Val pokes the fire, and displays his prize. It is Ted's broken water-mill !

She looks at it, and her eyes begin to fill with tears, as she remembers the little squeaky voice that asked her—
“a short time ago, if she understood mechanics, and tried to instruct her in that science. She touches the little mill almost caressingly and says,

“Oh, Val, where did you find it?”

“I’ll tell you what made me look first. You know Ted was awfully generous, and wanted to give away everything he had while he was ill, and several times he said he wished that he had got his water-mill, as then he should give it to me, because I tried to save it for him. But you see the mill was lost in the snow, and there was no use in trying to find it then, so I had to give it up, and told Mrs. Williams to tell Ted that I would get it if I could, and that seemed to satisfy him. I believe, poor little fellow, he thought I could do everything I tried, after that day.”

“And you found it! I am so glad!” exclaims Sue.

“Wait until I tell you about it,” answers Val. “I went out and looked about in the snow, but I found nothing, though I knew *about* where it had dropped. So I had to tell Mrs. Williams that I could not find it, and the very next day Ted died. She never told him that I could not find the mill, and I am *so* glad she didn’t, but when I went there the day after, she seemed to feel it so dreadfully that Ted’s favourite new toy should be lying broken in the snow, that I promised to look again. So this afternoon, as there was a thaw, I set off and had another hunt in the mud, and for a long time I couldn’t find it, but at last—after more than an hour’s search, I found it—not at all where I thought it would be, but much

farther down, where I suppose it had been drifting snow in the night. So I took it straight Williams—”

“Oh, Val, just as you were? All covered with mud?”

“Yes, just as I was, and she was as glad as possible the first time I have seen her smile since—because I thought that now every wish of Ted’s was fulfilled. *He* got his water-mill after all.”

“I am very glad about it,” says Sue, “and I think you deserve it, after having spent so much time looking for it. Have you shown it to Justin?”

“No, not yet, no one has seen it but you and Justin Williams,” and then Val carries away his treasure. Sue goes back to her book, much pleased to find that she has not repelled Val’s confidence.

They are all very glad when Val tells them news that he has found the lost water-mill, and he carries it away most carefully in the one box in his possession which he has not lost the key, and which also contains one or two other precious relics.

When Sue and Rupert are alone for a few minutes, Sue says impulsively,

“I had no idea that Val had so much in him. Before the holidays began, he seemed only a very mischievous boy, whose one idea was to plague everybody. Now he is so very different, and every one thinks so much of him, he is not like the same person.”

“I wonder if,—but I oughtn’t to tell you. It would be quite fair, and father told me not to talk of it.”

“Oh! what?” asks Sue, opening her eyes very

~~am~~ sure I will never talk about it to any one, so you ~~sy~~ tell me, Rupert. Do ! what was it ?”

“ Well,—I’d like you to know it,—only you must promise never to speak a word to Val about it, and *never* let him know I told you.”

“ Oh ! no, I promise.”

“ Well, the day that Val was hurt by the boys, when father came in, and we began to undress Val after the accident, father found a blue ribbon round his neck, and when he drew it out, what do think he saw ?”

“ Oh ! I don’t know, tell me !”

“ Why, the locket with mother’s picture. I believe he has worn it ever since.”

“ Has he ? ever since father gave it ? Oh ! who could have thought Val would have done such a thing ? but I can understand it now. It explains that trick he has had lately of putting his left hand on his chest when he is angry or excited. Dear Val ! But what did father say ? and didn’t Val know you found it ?”

“ Val was quite stupid at the time and noticed nothing. You should have seen father’s face ! He laid the locket back again on Val’s breast, and kissed him on the forehead with *such* a look in his eyes, and then he turned to me, saying, ‘ Remember, we must never speak of having found this. I feel as if it were almost like sacrilege having seen it !’ and then he began to speak of the cut on Val’s head, and he never said another word about it. But I know he often thinks of it, for I can see it in his face when he looks at Val.”

“ Oh, I am so glad you told me about it, because it makes me love Val more than ever. Somehow he always

kept his feelings more to himself than the rest of us did," and as Sue thinks it over, his confidence about the water-mill, which she was so nearly repulsing, grows very precious, and she begins to think of her position as eldest sister in a much more serious and sacred light than she has ever done. "Sister Sue," as Justin sometimes laughingly calls her, seems to her now a beautiful title, and one she would not exchange for many a grander one.

To be a real, true sister in heart and soul, ready with the *first* of the long series of self-sacrifices which usually fall to the lot of women in their relations with mankind, namely, the devotion of the sister to the brother, *this* is now Sue's ambition, and she feels proud that among her brothers, the last, but not by any means the *least*, is Justin Meadows.

Presently Justin comes in, and they sit talking round the fire, until he jumps up, saying, that it is late, and asks Rupert, just as he goes out, what book he has been reading. This leads to more conversation, and they go up stairs together to inspect Rupert's ever increasing library, there being a few minutes to spare before Justin must go, if he wishes to be in time for dinner.

As they come down again, Sue hears Justin say,

"That sounds rather dangerous."

And Rupert answers carelessly,

"Oh! I'm careful enough."



CHAPTER XXII.

ALARMS, FLAGS, AND A TELEGRAM.

THE holidays are almost over, when a sudden outbreak of measles in the town and in the neighbouring cottages, causes some alarm. The weather, since the thaw set in, has been mild, and the infection spreads rapidly.

Mr. Maskell will not reassemble his boys, for fear of its spreading among them, and the Grammar School does not open for the same reason.

Jacob's children all have it, and Justin has to avoid the cottage where he is always so welcome. But after a day or two Eve begins to sicken, and almost at the same time the little page, who waits on Mr. Meadows, and has been all the afternoon with Justin, putting his room in order and helping to pack sundry articles that Justin wishes to take back with him,—the boy wakes up next morning with a face as red as a nicely boiled lobster. So as the page has no home to go to, and as the mischief is done, the old housekeeper lights a grand fire in one of

the upper rooms, which is turned into a hospital for the time.

Dr. Rutherford will not allow either of the boys to return to Winchester on the day the holidays end, because they might carry the infection. Justin has never had measles, and Rupert is in the thick of it, for Syd is the next victim, and a day or two later Paul is discovered to have got the rash.

Justin is much annoyed at this delay in returning to school, but Rupert (who is not so eager about his studies) does not mind so much, though he too is sorry after a fashion. But then there are other joys at home, and he is easily consoled by Sue.

Justin also is fated to be kept at home, for no sooner is the page a little better, than the housemaid, who has done Justin's room every day, mended his clothes and cheerfully tidied all his rubbish, is also laid up, and that occasions another delay. However, as there is nothing to be done but wait and either take the measles or get rid of the infection, Justin soon reconciles himself to longer holidays, and cannot help being a little glad also when he sees Sue's radiant face.

Flags are now the order of the day, and Sue sits many a half hour with the British commercial code before her, spelling out the colours, and learning the code which Justin has written out for their use.

The trees at the Park House have been cut, so that from the cottage the flagstaff is plainly visible, and at all hours flags are hoisted and watched for from the different positions.

The Rutherfords have also their answering point, and

from between Rupert and Sue's windows a flag can be sent up to a staff arranged, by a contrivance of Justin's, above the window, so that at times the Cottage looks very festive.

For the benefit of those who wish to know how the flags are worked, I may as well give some account of the flags themselves. Those who are only impatient to hear the story, may skip this part.

There are twenty-two flags in all, and three are larger than the rest. There is the blue ensign, the red ensign, and the Union Jack ; then there is the answering pennant, red, with two white stripes, and after that follow all the consonants from B to W.

B, is a red burgee.

C, a white pennant with a red spot.

D, a blue pennant with a white spot.

F, a red pennant with a white spot.

G, a pennant,—yellow and blue.

H, a square flag, half white, half red.

J, a square, blue with a horizontal bar of white across the centre.

K, square, half yellow, half blue.

L, four squares of blue and yellow.

M, square, blue, with a St. Andrew's cross from corner to corner in white.

N, sixteen small squares of blue and white.

P, square, blue, with a centre square of white.

Q, yellow, square.

R, red, with a yellow cross dividing the red into four equal squares.

S, white, with a centre square in blue.

T, red, white, and blue, square.

V, white square, with St. Andrew's cross from corner to corner in red.

W, square, blue rim, white line within and square red centre.

To these flags Justin adds a code of his own, which he gives the Rutherfords, and some of the signs are as follows :

Red ensign. I am at home.

Blue ensign. Are you at home?

Union Jack. You are wanted here.

Then follows a most wonderful combination of words and sentences, to be spelt out on one or more flags. For instance, each member of the family is represented by a certain flag, which, hoisted with the red ensign, means that that particular one is at home.

Justin copies the code for the Rutherfords' benefit, and the first day the flags are used, there is the greatest excitement.

Rupert manages the flags, while Sue and Val sit with their heads touching, studying the code, and making an end of blunders.

"What's he got up now, Rupert?" asks Val; "just look out and never mind that string. Oh! I see, he has got N. W., Sue; what is N. W? Look there among the Ns."

"Oh! it means, 'can you see this plainly?'"

"Ah! that's all right, stick up 'Yes,' Rupert, and we shall get on like winking. This is sport." Only unfortunately Rupert hoists "No" instead of "Yes," and down comes the Park House signal in a great hurry.

and for a time there is suspense. Then up go two more flags, and Val spells out "W. R., 'what's wrong?'" Why should he put up that? Tell him it's all right, Rupert. Here, stick on S. H., that means 'all right,'" and Val hands out S. R., which means "all wrong."

Down come Justin's signals with a rush, and after long pause Justin himself, panting and breathless, appears under the window, asking, "I say, what is the matter with you all? Can't you see the signals properly?"

"Why, yes, we have been answering you all the time," replies Rupert, astonished.

"Fine sort of answers! I asked N. W. 'Can you see the signals plainly?' You hoisted the D pennant 'No.' Then I asked W. R., 'What's wrong?' And up comes S. R., 'All wrong.' What on earth do you mean?"

"Oh, good gracious!" and Rupert's head vanishes from the window, and he faces Val in dismay. "I say, you gave me the wrong flags!" he says, and then calls out to Justin to come up and see them.

Justin comes up at once; he has been a little put out by Rupert's bungling, but when he arrives in the room he has quite recovered his usual sweet temper, and smiles at Sue's anxious face, for she has heard *something* in the tone of his voice under the window that makes her half-guess what may happen next.

But Justin laughs at their mistakes, and looks round the room, which is strewn with flags.

"You'll never be able to answer signals if you fling things about like this. The fact is, there are too many of you. Here, Floss, turn your tidy mind to some

use for once, and help me roll up these flags. Now, look, as you take them off, you should roll them up, and lay them down near you, so that you can easily pick them up again. Now, Rupert, you sling up the flags which Val can hand to you, while Sue reads the code, and as Val takes them off, he can give them to Floss, who will put them back in their order. Now, I'm off, and we will see if we cannot do better this time."

"Oh! but Justin!" exclaims Sue, springing up and dropping the precious code, "why should you go away now?"

"To work the flags, to be sure."

"Oh! but—I shall dislike these flags very much if you are to keep away only to work them. Do stay here as long as you can, and we'll try again another time. We want *you*, not flags."

Then they all laugh. They have been so interested in their new hobby, that they have entirely forgotten that the reason they wanted a code was to communicate with each other *when they could not meet*, and not to stay away on purpose to talk by signals.

So Justin declares that Sue is the only one of the party with any common sense, and remains with them, talking over the code, and making suggestions and improvements.

While they are all talking, the front door bell rings sharply, and Sue says,

"Some one for father, I suppose," and then they go on talking.

Suddenly Floss lifts her hand and says,

"Hush!" and they are all silent, while they hear Mrs.

urrell's footsteps coming quickly up the stairs. Sue springs up to meet her, with a sudden dread in her heart, and the next moment her aunt opens the door, and beckons to her.

Poor Aunt Cosy! Her eyes are wide open, but they look as if they did not see anything, her face is very white, and her voice trembles.

"I have had a telegram," she says in low, husky tones; "Uncle Jeff—I must go to him at once. Can you help me, Sue?—I cannot wait for your father—I must go directly!"

"Dear Aunt Cosy! oh! I am so sorry," and Sue follows her aunt, to help her with her packing, while Austin jumps up, and says quickly,

"She'll want something to take her to the station. I'll go and see about that. Do you think you could find our father, Rupert?"

"Yes—I might—at any rate I'll try," and they disperse in different directions, Val going one way, and Rupert another, in the hope of meeting Dr. Rutherford, while Floss, who has been startled out of all propriety, runs to inform Miss Griggs of what has taken place. Grief in any form is so congenial to Miss Griggs, that she has almost a triumphant air as she tells Floss the number of times that she has known of people telegraphed for, but who have arrived too late to see their loved ones alive. Floss feels that something of importance has happened to them, and thinks that the family must be objects of interest for some time, particularly if Uncle Jeff dies, and they have new black frocks.

In the mean time, Sue has done real wonders in help-

ing poor Mrs. Turrell, for she has remembered many things that the almost heart-broken wife would have forgotten, even asking whether she has money enough for her long expensive journey.

Then Aunt Cosy *does* break down completely. She has only two pounds in her purse, and Sue in dismay counts over her own little savings, and can make no more than seven shillings—and seven shillings will not go very far towards such a railway journey. She is sure that Rupert has no money, and the other children have none. What *is* to be done?

Presently Rupert and Valentine return; their search for their father has proved fruitless, and they have heard that he has been suddenly sent for, to see a sick man seven miles off, and will not be home for more than an hour and a half. And by that time Aunt Cosy will have missed the night mail!

What *is* to be done? Rupert thinks of pawning his watch, Sue thinks of Mrs. Meadows, but is too shy to suggest anything, for fear of hurting Aunt Cosy's feelings. But while they are all debating what to do, Justin drives up in his father's carriage, and springs out.

"Are you ready, Mrs. Turrell?" he calls out, "because we have no more than enough time. Come, it's all right, and the carriage will get you there in no time."

"I can't—I have not money enough till my brother comes," says Mrs. Turrell almost wringing her hands in her despair; "you are very good, Justin,—but I must wait."

"Oh! no, you mustn't; it's all right. Father thought you might have a difficulty—as Dr. Rutherford was not

home—so he has sent you—There ! say good-bye and come, please, for I am going to the station with you.”

Mrs. Turrell cannot thank Justin, all she can do is to put her hands on his shoulders and draw his head down, bestowing a kiss upon him as if he were indeed her nephew.

And after that Mrs. Turrell says good-bye to them all, and drives off with Justin. She finds that Mr. and Mrs. Meadows have been even more thoughtful than she could have believed, for in the carriage is a warm fur rug, and in a little basket is some food and some grapes for her to eat on the journey, and a little flask of wine, all of which she knows she will be most grateful for, but had never thought of for herself. Justin takes her ticket, writes out all the trains for her, and finally, as they wait for the train to start, says all he can think of to cheer and comfort her.

And when the train starts at last, Aunt Cosy leans back in the carriage, wrapped up in the fur rug, and murmurs, “God bless that dear boy,” while Justin drives home to report to the excited young Rutherfords how their aunt has fared.

“Oh, Justin !” says Sue, as they stand alone for a moment, “how *splendid* it was of you to think about the money !”

“I didn’t, it was father ; and mother sent the rug and the basket, because Mrs. Turrell might have been ill if she went long without food.”

“How good of you all ! It was just like you to think of the right thing. How dreadful it might have been, if Aunt Cosy had been obliged to wait for papa !”



CHAPTER XXIII.

FIRE AND SMOKE.

DR. Rutherford returns home to find a very and somewhat disorderly household. Mrs. under whose gentle rule all has gone smoothly has left him, and Sue has resumed her arduous of head of the household, and is doing all she keep Valentine from tormenting Floss. Perhaps fortunate for her that the four younger ones are still in the nursery, on account of the measles. She is glad when her father comes in, and among the tell what has happened.

Justin is obliged to go home earlier than usual is going to a party that evening, so that Dr. Rutherford does not see him ; however, the doctor is determined to go over to Park House the following morning, to thank Mr. Meadows for all his kindness, and repay the debt he is so much obliged to Aunt Cosy.

But Dr. Rutherford and Mr. Meadows meet before either of them have anticipated.

Justin comes home from his party at half-past

And taking his candle, mounts slowly and sleepily to his room, while the carriage, that has brought him home, goes round to the stables. There is a fire in Justin's room, for the night is very cold, and his mother is afraid he may be chilly after his long drive. But in spite of the fire the room is cold, and there is a smell of smoke, so that Justin walks to the window, and finds it partly open.

As he leans forward to close it, he sees something very unusual,—a bright light in Rupert's bedroom. Now Justin has often seen Rupert's candle burning far into the night, but no candle ever gave such a light as this—and Justin watches it with a beating heart. It is a very red light—almost as if—Justin gives a start—as if it might be—flames !

Then as the glow increases, the boy hastily closes the window and scampers down stairs, in time to prevent the butler from locking up the front door.

"Here, let me out, Gregory," he calls hastily, "I must be off to the stables. There is a fire at Dr. Rutherford's, and I must take the carriage there. Don't disturb my father, but make Jane light a good fire in the drawing-room and study. I shall be back soon." And Justin rushes out.

At the stables it is only a matter of reclasping a few of the buckles, and John drives off his horses in a manner to which those quiet, well-behaved animals are not accustomed.

As they near the Cottage all is quiet, and Justin begins to think he must have been mistaken, so he stops the carriage at the gate.

But there is no mistake, for on going round to the side where Rupert's window faces, there is the light, and Justin, emboldened by the sight, gives a peal at the window.

In an instant the house is roused, as he hears well enough of the shrieks of terror that ensue, and when the door is opened he rushes in and makes at once for Rupert's room.

When he opens the door, the smoke almost blinds him in spite of the leaping flames that are darting their forked tongues all round the bed, and are also blazing freely by the window curtain. Rupert is not in bed, and as Justin takes a step forward into the room, he almost tumbles over him, as he lies completely dressed and in a senseless condition on the floor.

Dr. Rutherford is in the room a moment after Justin, and together they pull Rupert out of the smoke and carry him into the fresh air. Sue is the next consideration, for her room is by Rupert's, and her father goes to her rescue, leaving Rupert in Justin's care.

By this time nurse and the little ones are partly dressed, and as Rupert begins to show signs of returning life Justin leaves him, and goes to the nursery.

One by one the little ones are wrapped in their blankets and carried down to the carriage, and nurse is packed off with them to the Park House, Eve waiting with fright, Paul rather cross and sleepy, and Sydney shrieking with excitement and delight, so that nurse has some difficulty in keeping them warmly covered, and is in terror lest any of them should catch cold after having been ill with measles.





Val soon appears, having had the presence of mind to don at least one garment and a pair of boots, and he is of use in passing the buckets of water, with which an attempt is being made to extinguish the flames. After a few minutes Rupert has also sufficiently recovered from smothering to sit up and take care of himself, and Justin having packed off the nursery party, rushes after Rutherford.

He meets him at the door of Sue's room with the girl in his arms.

Is she hurt?" exclaims Justin in great alarm, but Rutherford answers,

No, thank God! she is only frightened and half smothered. Where is Miss Griggs?"

Justin and Val, who now joins him, go to find that she is dragged away in the midst of an elaborate toilet she has been endeavouring to make, and she is not allowed to wait even for her precious desk and all her treasures.

The carriage, which has returned, now carries off another load to the Park House, and by this time Mrs. Radows has risen, and receives them with the greatest hospitality. The children are fed with bread and milk, and then packed away in blankets, to finish their night's nap on sofas and in armchairs in the drawing-room, with a nurse to watch over them.

It is like a very strange nightmare to Sue, arriving at the Park House like an Indian squaw, with no more clothing covering than a couple of blankets, bare-footed, and with her golden hair streaming down to her waist.

When the rest of the party arrive, Sue has been

attired in a very grand dressing-gown (belonging to Meadows) covered with silk and lace, and her hair gathered up into a huge, untidy knot on her head, while she tucks away her bare feet—for she cannot put on tiny slippers Mrs. Meadows offers her—and tries to act as if nothing unusual had happened.

Dr. Rutherford comes last of all, and the glad news is told that the fire is out. A good deal of mischief has been done in one way and another. Rupert's room is a ruin, and the wall between his room and Sue's has fallen in, while Sue's room is blackened and scorched and altogether uninhabitable for the present. The dining-room is drenched with water, and the stair presents a most pitiable sight. Fortunately, no one has been injured by smoke and water, and the falling of the roof has been confined to the ruin of the room, but nothing that she values most highly.

Dr. Rutherford goes round to each child in turn, expressing a quiet thankfulness, and speaks of his loss with confidence, since none of his greatest treasures have been lost.

"Sue, my child, I had no idea that you could look so grown-up as you do in that costume. Ah, Mrs. Meadows, I don't know what to say to you! you are indeed a friend in need, to take us all in like this when we are homeless! Well, I must go back to my ruin—Rupert, do you intend to remain here?"

This is said with an unmistakable significance. Rupert looks perturbed, and does not speak. He knows that any one ought to suffer inconvenience on account of the fire he should be the one, but it is not a pleasant thing, and he thinks he has been punished quite enough.

‘Come, you must go back with me,” says the doctor a more decided tone; “we cannot trespass any more on the kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Meadows, for they have already taken in so many of us that I am almost ashamed. It is a terrible thing when these misfortunes occur to a large family. Heigh ho !”

And so, laughing and sighing at the same time, the doctor takes his leave of Mrs. Meadows, in spite of all entreaties, and carries off the unwilling Rupert with him.

What takes place during their walk back—for Dr. Rutherford will not hear of using the carriage any more—no one else ever knows, but the next morning, when they present themselves at the Park House at breakfast-time, Rupert is very quiet, and seems not a little ashamed of himself and his carelessness, which has caused so much loss and inconvenience to his father and the whole family.



CHAPTER XXIV.

EXPLANATIONS OF VARIOUS KINDS.

THE next morning, as soon as nurse can see, she leaves the little ones in their funny beds, asking one of the housemaids to take care of them, and then she goes off to the Cottage. In a short time she has collected from the various rooms, such things as the children, from Sue downwards, will want, and by being very quick and businesslike, she gets everything packed safely into a wheelbarrow and wheeled down to the Park House by Thomas, before any of the tired children have opened their eyes. And when each one wakes up, and peeps out from their strange beds, they find that nurse has made everything ready and comfortable for them, so that Sue can appear at breakfast as herself, and not as a very tall edition of Mrs. Meadows.

Mr. Meadows does not come down so early, but Dr. Rutherford, who has come over before breakfast, goes up to see him in his room, and thank him for all his kindness to Aunt Cosy, and also for his hospitality last night.

"I hope they will not be much in the way this morning," says the doctor with some hesitation. "I am afraid I must ask you to keep them until I can find rooms in one of the hotels in the town. I will come and fetch them as soon—"

"Nonsense, Rutherford, you will do nothing of the sort!" exclaims Mr. Meadows; "what on earth is the use of this great house, unless it can hold my friends,—particularly when there is such a good reason for keeping them! No! I cannot let these children go yet, there is plenty of room for them and for me too. I shall really be angry if you take them away when I want to renew my acquaintance with them all."

"That is all very well, but you don't know what it is to have eight children in a house! Fortunately nature has provided that their parents shall become accustomed to them by degrees, and I am by this time sufficiently hardened to their ways. But *you*!—No, the thing is impossible."

"Not at all impossible. Let them stay here, and I promise you that the moment they are in the slightest degree in the way, I will tell you, and you shall take them where you please. Come, you must let me have my way in this. It will be so much better for us all."

And at length Dr. Rutherford consents, but he goes down and gives his family a lecture on good behaviour, which makes them all look rather grave.

Anything more delightful than to be burnt out of the house and home, the little ones cannot imagine; the new ferry at the end of a long passage (as far as possible in the rooms that Mr. Meadows frequents) has filled



CHAPTER XXIII.

FIRE AND SMOKE.

DR. Rutherford returns home to find a very excited and somewhat disorderly household. Mrs. Turrell, under whose gentle rule all has gone smoothly hitherto, has left him, and Sue has resumed her arduous position of head of the household, and is doing all she can to keep Valentine from tormenting Floss. Perhaps it is fortunate for her that the four younger ones are still kept in the nursery, on account of the measles. She is very glad when her father comes in, and among them they tell what has happened.

Justin is obliged to go home earlier than usual, as he is going to a party that evening, so that Dr. Rutherford does not see him; however, the doctor is determined to go over to Park House the following morning, to thank Mr. Meadows for all his kindness, and repay the sum lent to Aunt Cosy.

But Dr. Rutherford and Mr. Meadows meet sooner than either of them have anticipated.

Justin comes home from his party at half-past twelve,

at happened to him. Perhaps he is on a desert island, and will come back some day like Enoch Arden ! I am sorry to think how often you must be reminded of our sorrow by all of us, and how much we must all miss you."

Miss Griggs accepts Sue's sympathy with a sob, and displays a lock of hair, (rather dusty with age,) and a faded photograph. These, and the hair ring, with one or two letters written on pink note paper with gilded edges, are the poor lady's whole stock of relics.

Sue looks at them with mingled pity and reverence. They are the ashes of a romance,—a commonplace one, perhaps, but *the* romance of Miss Griggs's life, and Sue is quick to feel that, while the very absurdity and worthlessness of the treasures so religiously kept, give something of a tragic vein to Sue's thoughts.

When Rupert comes in, Miss Griggs hastily hides her relics, that no scornful eye may rest on them, and Sue begins to ask Rupert what is being done at the Cottage, and he tells her. There is a great deal of cleaning to be done, and some of the rooms have to be entirely cleared, and shut up to wait until the weather will allow of further repairs.

And then Sue asks, what she has never had courage to do before, if Rupert will tell her how the fire *really* began. And being in a softened mood, he tells as follows :

"Why, you see, I had often been reading in my room, though father had told me not to do it, and I thought it was safe enough, for I always put the candle away from the bed. I didn't undress that night, for I was excited



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FIRE AND SMOKE.

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Justin is obliged to go home earlier than usual, as he is going to a party that evening, so that Dr. Rutherford does not see him; however, the doctor is determined to go over to Park House the following morning, to thank Mr. Meadows for all his kindness, and repay the debt he is lent to Aunt Cosy.

But Dr. Rutherford and Mr. Meadows meet before either of them have anticipated.

Justin comes home from his party at half-past ten.

And taking his candle, mounts slowly and sleepily to his room, while the carriage, that has brought him home, goes round to the stables. There is a fire in Justin's room, for the night is very cold, and his mother is afraid he may be chilly after his long drive. But in spite of the fire the room is cold, and there is a smell of smoke, so that Justin walks to the window, and finds it partly open.

As he leans forward to close it, he sees something very unusual,—a bright light in Rupert's bedroom. Now Justin has often seen Rupert's candle burning far into the night, but no candle ever gave such a light as this—and Justin watches it with a beating heart. It is a very red light—almost as if—Justin gives a start—as if it might be—flames!

Then as the glow increases, the boy hastily closes the window and scampers down stairs, in time to prevent the butler from locking up the front door.

"Here, let me out, Gregory," he calls hastily, "I must be off to the stables. There is a fire at Dr. Rutherford's, and I must take the carriage there. Don't disturb my father, but make Jane light a good fire in the drawing-room and study. I shall be back soon." And Justin rushes out.

At the stables it is only a matter of reclasping a few of the buckles, and John drives off his horses in a manner to which those quiet, well-behaved animals are not accustomed.

As they near the Cottage all is quiet, and Justin begins to think he must have been mistaken, so he stops the carriage at the gate.

But there is no mistake, for on going round to the side where Rupert's window faces, there is the light, and Justin, emboldened by the sight, gives a peal at the night-bell.

In an instant the house is roused, as he hears well enough by the shrieks of terror that ensue, and when the door is opened, he rushes in and makes at once for Rupert's room.

When he opens the door, the smoke almost blinds him, in spite of the leaping flames that are darting their forked tongues all round the bed, and are also blazing finely up the window curtain. Rupert is not in bed, and as Justin takes a step forward into the room, he almost tumbles over him, as he lies completely dressed and in a senseless condition on the floor.

Dr. Rutherford is in the room a moment after Justin, and together they pull Rupert out of the smoke and carry him into the fresh air. Sue is the next consideration, for her room is by Rupert's, and her father goes to her rescue, leaving Rupert in Justin's care.

By this time nurse and the little ones are partly dressed, and as Rupert begins to show signs of returning life Justin leaves him, and goes to the nursery.

One by one the little ones are wrapped in their blankets and carried down to the carriage, and nurse is packed off with them to the Park House, Eve wailing with fright, Paul rather cross and sleepy, and Sydney shrieking with excitement and delight, so that nurse has some difficulty in keeping them warmly covered, and is in terror lest any of them should catch cold after having been ill with measles.



[illegible]

Val soon appears, having had the presence of mind to put on at least one garment and a pair of boots, and he is of use in passing the buckets of water, with which an attempt is being made to extinguish the flames. After a few minutes Rupert has also sufficiently recovered from his smothering to sit up and take care of himself, and Justin having packed off the nursery party, rushes after him to Rutherford.

He meets him at the door of Sue's room with the girl in his arms.

"Is she hurt?" exclaims Justin in great alarm, but Rutherford answers,

"No, thank God! she is only frightened and half smothered. Where is Miss Griggs?"

Justin and Val, who now joins him, go to find that Miss Griggs, and she is dragged away in the midst of an elaborate toilet she has been endeavouring to make, and she is not allowed to wait even for her precious desk and all her treasures.

The carriage, which has returned, now carries off another load to the Park House, and by this time Mrs. Meadows has risen, and receives them with the greatest hospitality. The children are fed with bread and milk, and are then packed away in blankets, to finish their night's rest on sofas and in armchairs in the drawing-room, with Sue to watch over them.

It is like a very strange nightmare to Sue, arriving at

Park House like an Indian squaw, with no more valuable covering than a couple of blankets, bare-footed, and with her golden hair streaming down to her waist.

But when the rest of the party arrive, Sue has been



Cotton.

PART I.

IN a dim, little street, up a narrow, winding staircase, was a little room. In this room, hardly visible through the twilight, and the smoke which came in gusts from the narrow fireplace, sat two little girls. A little boy, of about four years of age, was crouched down between them, and in a miserable-looking, wicker cradle, lay a tiny wizen baby.

The two girls were about ten and twelve years old, and they were talking in low voices.

"I wonder when mother will come home," said the elder girl anxiously; "it is so cold to-night, and mother is not often as late as this. Don't you think we could do something to make the fire better, Ally?"

"I don't know," said ten-years-old Ally very drearily; "there's no more wood, Bab, and I don't see how we can get any. If we were *only* at home again, with the *fen* and the wood and plenty of it, just for the picking; and the sea—oh! Bab, I do *want* my sea so!"

Bab !” said her mother cheering up. “ Do you remember the kind old clergyman who lived at Seatown before the new Vicar came ?”

“ Why, yes, mother, of course I do ! Dear Mr. Bentley ! How kind he was to us, and so fond of father. Don’t you remember when father was at home and used to go fishing, that Mr. Bentley would always buy father’s fish, because he said it was fresher than any other. It wasn’t, was it, mother ? but Mr. Bentley thought so. And did you see him, mother ?”

“ No, dear, I didn’t see him, but as I was looking into the grocer’s shop, wondering how I could get a bit of tea and sugar for you, poor children, a lady came out, and she knew me, bless her ! She held out her hand and said, ‘ Mrs. Wilson !’ and it seemed to carry me back years, Bab, it sounded so natural, just as she used to say it when father’s ship was coming home, and she brought us the news.”

“ Then you saw Miss Emily ! Oh, I wish I had seen her ! What did she say ?”

“ I can’t remember all she said, Bab. She asked after father, of course. Oh, she was sorry for us, and she spoke so beautifully it made me cry to hear her, and then she asked how we lived, and then she bought all those things for us, and she is coming to see us when she has time.”

“ That will be nice ! Dear Miss Emily !”

“ But she isn’t going to be here very long, she said. She’s going to be married, Bab, and live at the Squire’s near Seatown. She was so sorry we had moved, she said, for she is going to marry the Squire’s son, and none

poor people at Seatown will be forgotten while
as there, I know that !”

his moment Jim tumbled forward on to the table,
leap ; Ally grumbled that she was *so* tired, and
egan to wake, so Bab cleared away the remains
supper, and then they all went into a little room,
ch bigger than a cupboard, where there were two
beds, very clean, but oh ! so hard and thinly
l.

Wilson and the little ones shared one, Bab and
nd the other.

last sound heard that night was poor Ally lament-
er her cold feet.

PART II.

kept a brave heart all Sunday, and on Monday
rted off looking as cheerful as if she were going
arty. But when her mother could no longer see
ib's face was much graver, and all its brightness
d. She was shy, and it pained her to go among
ugh girls who worked at the mills. However,
was no help for it, and Bab always made the
f her troubles. She was a quick little woman,
r at most things,” her mother said, and she there-
on learnt her work, and did it as well as she

the hot, close rooms, the sickening smell of the
: never-ceasing noise of the wheels, the want of
ood, and her beloved sea breezes, soon made the
ut the mere shadow of herself. She lost her ap-
lost her brightness, and seemed always tired,—

tired in the morning when she got up, tired all day at her work, tired, almost to death, when she came home at night.

Miss Emily came to see Mrs. Wilson, but she could not come at the hours when she would have found Bab at home, so the child did not see her. If she had, I am sure Miss Emily would have stopped Bab's working at the mills. Mrs. Wilson, who saw the child every day, did not notice the change, and if she had, she could not have helped it. Bab must work or starve.

Ally sat at home with Jim and the baby, and the little ones had not half such a pleasant time as when Bab looked after them and would laugh, and talk, and sing. Ally generally fretted and grumbled, said how cold it was, and burnt more coal than they could afford, in the effort to keep herself warm.

It was a hard winter,—every one remembers it; food and firing were so dear,—because every one wanted them so badly, and the bread went up, and the wages went down.

Bab worked like a little slave, for her mother caught a bad cold, and could not leave the house for weeks, and then all they had to depend upon was little Bab's wages. Then Bab began to lie awake at night,—first it was so cold, she could hardly sleep for that, then it seemed as if the great wheels were always turning and turning before her when she shut her eyes, and the noise of them kept sounding in her ears, always whir,—whir,—whir,—so that rest was impossible.

And then a day came when Grainger's great cotton mills were shut up, and no one went in or out of the

barred gates, and the streets were full of angry, fierce-looking men, and there was what is called a *strike*.

The men would not work without higher wages, and the master would not give them.

But the closing of the mills did not affect our little Bab. The very morning of the strike she had called to her mother from her bed, and when Mrs. Wilson came, Bab whispered,

"It's no use, mother! I've tried,—but I can't lift my head to-day,—it swims so."

"If you're going to be ill and die, Bab," said her mother, "we'd better all starve together. I don't see how we are to live without you."

"Why, mother, you have forgotten Miss Emily," said Bab, with a weak little smile.

"Miss Emily can't help us now, Bab. She's married and gone to live at Seatown, and there's no other help but the workhouse!"

"Mother, don't you remember what Miss Emily said about the ravens, and how GOD feeds them? And He will feed us somehow—you will see!"

"Plenty of ravens die this weather," said poor Mrs. Wilson, despondently, "and plenty of Christians too, Bab."

But Bab answered, "Then, mother, it is because it is better for them, and God knows it!"

That was the dreariest day in the whole of that long winter, the dreariest and the longest. Mrs. Wilson went out in hopes of hearing of some work to do, Ally sat and shivered over the fire, and the little ones were fretful, they hardly knew why.

Bab lay on a little mattress on the floor in the sitting-room, for it was a little warmer there than in the cupboard-bedroom.

She lay, and dozed, and woke, and dreamt such lovely dreams that only made the waking harder than before.

It was dusk, and dusk came early in those winter days, and Bab began to wonder why her mother was so late, as she had wondered once before. Ally was beginning to moan about mother and the cold, and Jim was ready to take up the burden, when the door was softly opened.

Some one—not mother!—stood for a moment in the doorway, trying to see through the smoke and gloom; then a voice asked,

“Is Mrs. Wilson at home?”

“It’s Miss Emily!” cried Bab, trying to raise herself, “*dear* Miss Emily, you’ve come to us again!”

“Why, Bab,” said Miss Emily, (or rather Mrs. Somebody else,) coming in; “I thought I was never to see you again! But how is this, Bab? Have you been ill?”

“No, not before to-day,” answered Bab, as the lady sat down beside her; “I don’t mind it—only because of mother. But there’s a strike on now, and the mills have stopped working, so I couldn’t go if I wished.”

“And when will mother come home?” asked the late Miss Emily, looking towards the door which stood ajar. “She will not be long, I suppose.”

“I hope not,” said Bab; “I think I hear her—no! it’s not her step—but there is some one outside!”

The *some one* could not stay outside any longer. With one push, the door flew open, and a strong, fine looking sailor walked in.

used herself on her hands and stared at him as forward, and then "Miss Emily," half laughing crying, said quickly, "Yes, Bab, you're quite 's your father—Jim Wilson!"

ext moment, Bab was clinging round his neck, was sobbing over her.

her father—come back from the dead, it seemed h, come back from the sea which had so nearly d him up, and which *had* swallowed so many of nates.

Mrs. Wilson came back half an hour later, she ab standing at the door, and the child called out abling voice,

o is in here, mother?—don't look, but guess. I D would feed us somehow, and He has! We isitor just come, mother, some one very precious one we all love and some one we all thought—

Mrs. Wilson gave a great cry, rushed into the d into her husband's arms.

mpossible to give you Jim Wilson's long account shipwreck, and how he was saved, which he told sailor style; but as soon as he had told them ng, he went out and bought them a splendid even better than Miss Emily's, and then they had ot of wood and coals, and made up a better fire y had seen that winter.

vas soon well again; the rest, the better food and er's presence, gave her all the tonic and rest she l, and before the spring came, she was looking old, sweet self.

ing noises I know, and makes me feel inclined to smash everything."

Sue laughs, and then wonders if Miss Griggs can hear it, and whether she will mind *very* much, but she makes no remark. The list continues and grows longer rapidly, for Justin has taken the pencil from his father, and now sits on the lower step, at Sue's feet. Suddenly the door opens, and Eve's head appears ; but there is nothing in the room to tempt her in, and she has a great terror of Mr. Meadows in his big wheeled chair, which no amount of coaxing, sugarplums, or toys can overcome. So she withdraws her head very quickly, slams the door, and they hear her little feet pattering on down the passage.

Miss Griggs is following, but she is slower, and Sue jumps down from the steps, saying hurriedly, "I must go after Eve. I hear she has gone into the drawing-room, and she may do no end of mischief there."

Justin follows Sue, but they both pause as they see Miss Griggs pursuing Eve, in a vain endeavour to catch the little runaway.

The sound of the piano ceases, and the next moment a shriek rings through the house, and when Sue and Justin rush in, they find Miss Griggs extended on the sofa in violent hysterics, while the tuner hangs over her with clasped hands, and Eve, looking as if she does not know whether to laugh or cry, stands looking at them.

"Oh, Miss Griggs, I am *so* sorry," begins Sue. "You ought not to have come down.—I am afraid you have had a shock—!"

"She will be better in a moment, miss," says the

tuner, rather too officiously Sue thinks, "I've known this sort of thing before."

"Yes, I am better," gasps Miss Griggs, "oh! oh! oh! Roland! Roland!"

Sue begins to feel that this is an unwomanly display of feeling before a stranger, and is blushing for Miss Griggs, when to her astonishment the tuner responds tenderly,

"Are you better, Louisa? Answer me, dearest, and say that the shock of my sudden appearance has not quite overcome you!"

Then Sue seizes Eve by the hand, drags her out of the room and shuts the door. Justin has also escaped, and stands looking much aghast, staring at Sue.

"Are they both mad?" he asks. "Shall I fetch your father and a couple of strait waistcoats?"

"Oh, no, it is all right," says Sue, as they return to the library with Eve, "only it's very strange. Fancy her old lover turning up here, after she had believed for five whole years that he was drowned. I wonder where he has been all this time."

When about half-an-hour has elapsed, Miss Griggs comes forth from the drawing-room, and Mr. Roland West sits down to put the piano more hopelessly out of tune than that much enduring instrument ever was in its existence—and then he goes away.

That evening when Dr. Rutherford comes in to take a look at his children, Miss Griggs solemnly asks for an interview with him, during which he hears of the gentleman's return, and is somewhat dismayed when Miss Griggs asks him to allow her to leave him as soon as possible, as she has promised to be married next month to Mr.

West. Dr. Rutherford can only murmur congratulations to her, and feel inwardly much perplexed as to what he is to do next, and then the interview comes to an end.

The strangest part of it all, is the extraordinary change in Miss Griggs. She is lively, laughs, sings, joins in the children's games, and only once does Sue hear her sigh that evening, as she exclaims,

"Oh dear, I *am* so happy!"

The sight of her joy is quite touching, and Sue thinks that perhaps they have not properly understood Miss Griggs all this time, and that she is in reality of a very lively and cheerful disposition, when not oppressed by the weight of her woes.

Sydney remembers his old question this evening, and again asks Miss Griggs if she is merry, to which she replies by laughing heartily, and kissing the chubby face that is turned up to hers.

No fresh cases of measles having occurred, the day on which the boys are considered safe to return to Winchester comes at last; only too soon for the others, and Sue appears at breakfast on the morning, with very red eyes. They are a rather silent party, for Mrs. Meadows does not like parting from her son, and Justin has enjoyed these holidays as he has enjoyed no others that he can remember.

Before the meal is over, Floss is in tears, and Sue has hard work not to follow her example. What *are* they to do with themselves when the boys have gone? What will become of them? There will be nothing left to enjoy—nothing!—but in the midst of these lamentations, Justin exclaims,

"Why, my good girls! there's Easter to look forward to, and then Midsummer, and after that Christmas! You will find the time pass like lightning; it will have 'gone from your gaze like a beautiful dream' before you know where you are! And won't it be fun coming home again! Floss, if you cry another tear, I declare I'll cut off that pet curl, and put it in my treasure-box!"

This threat has the desired effect, and Floss dries her eyes, and Sue recovers her powers of speech. But it is a trying moment when the carriage comes round to the door, and Rupert and Justin have to say good-bye.

They all assemble in the hall, even Mr. Meadows comes, and there is a great confusion of voices and a great deal of kissing and some crying, and then the carriage drives off, while Sue dries her eyes, and wonders whether Justin kissed her by mistake, or whether he really meant to do it.

Anyhow she is glad, because if she is "Sister Sue," she must treat him just the same as Rupert.

The rest of the day is a very miserable affair after that, and Sue feels quite glad when the lamp is lighted, only there is no Rupert, and no Justin, to come and rouse her with merry talk and absurd stories.

Valentine has still some holiday left, for Mr. Maskell's school does not reassemble for two days yet, and Val lingers about round Sue, until at last she suggests reading another of Aunt Cosy's stories, and as the little ones readily accept her offer, she fetches the manuscript, and reads the story called "Velvet."



Helvet.

PART I.

On this day only.

WILMOT'S GRAND CIRCUS AND TROUPE.

Wonderful varieties! Great attractions!

Miss Rosalba Sinclair in her unrivalled Trick Act on
PEGASUS, THE FLYING STEED OF THE DESERT!

Sholto, the Marvellous Clown,

With his Seven Performing Dogs!

An Entertainment hitherto unsurpassed.

ALSO THE GREAT MENAGERIE.

Lions! Camels!! Dromedaries!!! Elephants!!!!

&c. &c. &c.

This day only!!!

SUCH was the advertisement posted all over the little town of Chadbury-on-Sea.

There had been a grand procession through the town the day before, which had created much excitement in that usually quiet, summer resort.

Miss Rosalba Sinclair, a pale, thin child of eleven

f age, had been led in triumph along the streets Flying Steed of the Desert ; the clown bringing : rear, driving three donkeys tandem, and surd by his seven dogs.

re was also a grand painted, triumphal car, on Mrs. Wilmot was seated, dressed as Britannia and g the British flag. The camels, dromedaries, and uts, followed in a melancholy row, ridden by : looking men, in uncouth dresses, the lions were p in a huge boarded cage, and roared to announce resence, which otherwise might not have been disd, in spite of the enormous lion, painted on the a outside of the cage.

rything was very gorgeous, very tawdry, and very and looking from the sea, which reflected the ul sunlight of that August evening, to the strange t as it filed past, the tinsel and spangles had a holy, unreal glitter.

course there was a great crowd to see them go by, the little boys and girls of Chadbury were thronged streets, with eager, excited faces, wondering r their fathers and mothers would be able to spare a sixpences to allow of their seeing the grand enment on the following day.

n't she lovely though !" cried one group, as the g Steed" walked soberly past them, with its slight . " Ain't she lovely in that green frock, and them oots? Oh, my !"

dress which excited so much admiration was a velvet tunic, barely reaching to the child's knees, ofusely sprinkled with spangles ; silk tights, and

high green satin boots with tiny, gilt spurs completed the dress. On the child's head was a little green hat, with a long white feather, and her fair, wavy hair fell over her shoulders half way to her waist.

Her small, thin hands were hidden in dirty white riding-gloves, with long gauntlets, and she looked like a little Amazon.

The child's face had a weary, listless expression, and she seemed to care nothing about the procession, but glanced with some curiosity at the children whose admiration she had overheard.

They were little children like herself, but unused to such splendours, and to the unreal life which this poor child led. To them the paint, pasteboard and gilding were real and beautiful, so they turned away from the sea, and the sunset which was glowing over the waves, and admired the lion's car, and Britannia with her waving flag and yellow helmet.

Poor little Miss Rosalba Sinclair would far rather have been running on the sands and listening to the sound of the waves, than riding in that long procession, to the clash and clang of the brass band which followed in a great car drawn by ten horses. She envied the little children their freedom and the happy seaside life, far away from that ear-splitting band, the smell of sawdust, and all the noise and bustle of a travelling circus.

And all the time, *they* were envying her her splendours, her velvet tunic, satin boots, gilt spurs, and above all, the green hat with the white feather.

But the procession passed on, the sunset faded, the

und of the band grew fainter and fainter, till it died
ay, and the children went home to their suppers.

The cavalcade at length reached the large green, where
ood the tent (in which the performance was to take
ace on the following day) and the carts and caravans,
hich were the only homes of these wandering people.
Miss Rosalba Sinclair was lifted from her horse by her
ther, "Sholto," the great clown, and the procession
as ended.

After a time, sleep and quiet reigned over the whole
ircus, except for the occasional bark of one of the per-
forming dogs, or a heavy stamp from one of the horses ;
nd so, silently and peacefully, the morning of the great
ntertainment dawned.

Soon, round the great tent where the circus was to be
eld, all was noise and bustle. The lions roared, the
ones neighed, the dogs barked, the elephants trumpeted ;
everything was preparing for the grand entertainment.
'Sholto' was feeding his dogs, dressed in a rough, rather
tattered coat, and greasy fur cap, when his little girl came
p to him and asked, rather timidly,

"Father, do you think I might go down to the shore
nd see the waves ? It is such a beautiful day !"

"Oh ! yes, be off," said "Sholto," bestowing an extra
uthful on the black, shaved poodle, which was the
verest of the seven. "Wilmot won't want you hanging
nd this morning, I dare say. But be back by twelve,
: we begin at half-past two, and you come in third to-
y. Go on, I'll give you leave."

A small child, dressed in a shabby and patched merino
ck and battered straw hat with a faded ribbon, made

her way quickly and silently through the litter of wood, cardboard, benches, and sawdust, strewn about in the greatest confusion. As she stepped over a large placard, announcing that the "grand performance" would take place that day only, "doors will be opened at 2 p.m.," (the doors being a slit in the big tent) Mrs. Wilmot called out in a shrill voice,

"Where are *you* off to, Nellie Mason?"

"I'm only going down to the shore, ma'am; oh! mayn't I?" and there was a quiver in the child's voice as she spoke, that showed her eagerness and anxiety.

"Don't your father want you?" suggested Mrs. Wilmot.

"No, oh! no, he gave me leave," answered Nellie quickly.

"Very well then, go along. Be home in time though!"

The child went on once more, but was fated to be again stopped.

"Nellie Mason, where are you going?" shouted red-faced Mr. Wilmot, in his loud, harsh voice. Nellie trembled and shrank in fear from him, as she answered gently,

"Only to the shore—to the beach, sir."

"Does your father know?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh!"

Nellie waited a moment to see if she would be forbidden to go, and she felt quite relieved when Mr. Wilmot, turning fiercely towards a small, pale-faced, half-starved carpenter, wished to know "what on earth he was about!"

So finding herself forgotten, the child went on, and soon left the noise and smell of the "grand circus" behind.

No one, who had seen the quiet, shabby little figure of Nellie Mason, as she walked quickly down one of the winding streets towards the sea that morning, would have recognised in her, the beautiful Miss Rosalba Sinclair who had enchanted them the evening before with her graceful figure and magnificent dress.

But she was the same, and Nellie Mason was her *real* name, only Mr. Wilmot thought "Rosalba Sinclair" looked better on the programmes and advertisements.

"Sounds grander and more Frenchified," he had said. Mr. Wilmot had also given her father, Tom Mason, the name of "Sholto," because a clown must always have some peculiar name. It makes the little boys and girls laugh at him more.

All this time, Nellie Mason was walking down to the beach. It was rather a long way, but she enjoyed every step of it, and the sea breeze brought a little colour into her pale cheeks and a sparkle into her sad, grey eyes. At last after a time, she reached the parade, and then the beach, and last of all she stood upon the smooth, wet sand close to the waves. The little ripples came to her feet and washed over the toes of her boots, and then she laughed for joy, for Nellie loved the sea, and did not want to have the chance of spending a morning near it.

The last time the circus came to Chadbury, she had been kept at home to sew the spangles on to Mrs. Wilmot's new tarlatan dress, and many salt tears had fallen on it—spangles of a very different kind!

What a merry morning Nellie had, with the sea for her playground. She had no proprieties to think of, and was thoroughly happy. Off came her shoes and stockings,

and then the game began. The little waves seemed to understand it quite well, and would dart forward and ripple over the child's bare feet, sometimes taking her by surprise and splashing her ankles as well.

While this was going on, the wind had its own little game with her, trying to pull off the shabby straw hat that covered the tight plaits which would produce, that afternoon, the lovely wavy locks of Miss Rosalba Sinclair, that had enchanted so many the day before.

The wind was a great friend of Nellie's, though it frightened her sometimes by trying to tear up the great circus tent, dragging at the cords that held it, and flapping about the sides as if it felt sure that in time everything would give way to it.

And so, for an hour or more, little Nellie Mason was perfectly happy with her two playfellows, the Wind and the Sea.

PART II.

All things must have an end, even Nellie's delightful play with the wind and the waves, but she did not know the hour, and could not bear to lose any of these precious minutes.

"Please, sir, could you tell me the time?" asked a shy, soft voice, while two grey eyes looked up into the face of a gentleman, who was walking with his little girl on the sands.

He looked down and saw a pleading face with large grey eyes, little hands that held boots and stockings, and little feet that were bare.

"It is a quarter past eleven," said the gentleman taking out his watch; "exactly a quarter past."

Thank you, sir."

! was so full of disappointment and dismay, that
irl, standing near the gentleman, said,
is the matter? You seem quite sorry."

t's only—only that I shall have to go home in
of an hour, and I love the sea so much!"

ou? So do I," said the other little girl, and
smiling, holding her father's hand.

is no doubt that if she had known she had been
to Miss Rosalba Sinclair of Wilmot's Grand
e would have been much excited and pleased
1 there was no one to tell her.

gazed after them wistfully, and thought what a
e lady that was, dressed all in white, and walk-
er papa.

; his hand too! how nice that must be, and
/ *she* would feel if she could walk so with her
l wear a dress like that.

ad always thought white so lovely, and wished
ot would let her wear it instead of always green
e was so tired of green velvet!

time was up, and she must go home. Slowly
ad her steps up the hilly street, her thoughts
the pretty little lady in the white dress,
st she determined to put her wishes into

ne was at dinner, except a few carpenters,
lie walked once more into the maze of carts

ilmot was sitting on a box, eating some cold
1 Nellie drew near.

"Well," she said, more amiably than usual, "did you enjoy yourself, child?"

"Oh, yes," said Nellie, eagerly, "it was lovely! Mrs. Wilmot—"

"Well? What is it? Can't you speak all of a sudden?"

"Shall we be having any new dresses soon?"

"I don't know,—I can't say. Why do you want to know?"

"Because,—if we are,—oh! Mrs. Wilmot,—may I have a *white* dress?—may I? Because white is so beautiful."

Mrs. Wilmot looked at the child's flushed and eager face, and thought that it would be a very long time before a new dress would be wanted, and Nellie would have forgotten it by then. So, as it cost her nothing to be good-natured, she answered,

"Well, Nellie Mason, the next dress you have shall be a white one."

How gratefully Nellie thanked her, and she went on to her father's caravan quite happy. By half past two o'clock, the great tent was full of eager, expectant faces, rosy-cheeked boys and girls, grey-headed papas and mammas; it seemed as if every one in Chadbury between the ages of six and sixty had come to see the "grand entertainment." There was much clapping and laughter as "Sholto" bounded into the circle with his strange clown's dress, and red and white paint. Then Mrs. Wilmot, (she was called on the programme "Miss Ethelinda Vavasour,") rode in, on a beautiful black horse, and the fun began.

seemed no end to the clever tricks "Miss Ethelinda" made her horse do. He bowed to the band, (which was perched up on the top of a , instead of an orchestra,) and a great many wonderful feats did "Miss Ethelinda" and her form.

he tore round the circle, kicking in time to a band played, and then Mrs. Wilmot rode him : ring.

at "Sholto" made all the little boys and girls much indeed, by an absurd scene with Mr. who stood in the middle holding a long whip, wonderfully attired in a black dress coat and der kid gloves.

ly a man came in who seemed to have fewer his body than other people are said to possess. d himself into the most surprising shapes, tied o into knots, and untied himself again, and nk a glass of water while standing on his head, ut spilling a drop.

ne considered it very clever, except a few people not like to see such things, and thought them ble. When he was gone there was a pause, sus, the Flying Steed of the Desert, was brought ig and rearing, and he galloped madly round once or twice, with a large, broad, flat saddle k, and there was a hush of expectation as they "Miss Rosalba Sinclair."

moment, "Miss Rosalba Sinclair" was led in by Mr. Wilmot himself, and after giving two

or three little jumps and curtseys, Pegasus was again made to gallop round. There was nothing very "flying" about Pegasus now. He was going at a steady canter, rocking his fat, white body to and fro with a very gentle movement. The child was dressed in her green velvet, but she had neither hat, boots, nor spurs, only little white sandal shoes on her feet, and in her hand she held a thin white riding whip.

With this whip, she gave one or two cuts at Pegasus as he went past, but the third time she made a spring and catching a little strap, hung on to the saddle, and was carried round once in that position.

After that she climbed and stood upright on the saddle holding two long white reins in her hand, and urging on the horse with her tiny whip. Then she stood on one leg and kissed her hand to the audience as she went round, dancing and jumping. A skipping-rope was given to her, and she skipped to the music as the horse cantered faster and faster.

At last, Pegasus was stopped and the most wonderful part of the performance was to come.

The saddle was taken off and Pegasus was let loose with only a head-piece, and a wide strap round his body.

The child waited till he came near her, and then, with one spring, she was clinging to this strap, and the next moment stood on the horse's bare back.

Then hoops were brought, and Nellie jumped through them and over them, and did all sorts of pretty and graceful tricks with them.

But at last three brown looking hoops were brought in and were set on fire, and Miss Rosalba Sinclair was to

jump through the flames! All the little boys and girls held their breath at the idea, but little Nellie Mason did not seem at all afraid. She had done it many times before, and as she stood waiting for them to get everything ready, she was thinking about the sea, and the white dress Mrs. Wilmot had promised her.

All was prepared, off went Pegasus, and Nellie sprang lightly and easily through the first and second flaming hoop—but—how it was, no one ever knew—whether the men in lowering the hoop as she jumped touched the horse with it, or whether Nellie herself, not thinking enough of what she was doing, let her whip touch him—it so happened, that when they came round to the third hoop, Pegasus gave an extra leap forward and kicked, so that the child fell, and in falling received a severe blow from the horse's hoof.

In a moment the music stopped, some one caught the animal's bridle, and several of the men ran to pick up little Nellie. She was feeling sick and giddy, but she was just able to make a curtsy to the audience, and Mr. Wilmot came forward to say that she was not hurt.

But the moment she was beyond the tent, she reeled and fell into her father's arms, begging to be carried away—right away from all the noise of clapping and laughter. They took her to the little caravan in which she and her father lived, and laid her down on the floor, then some one went for a doctor, and Mr. Wilmot was heard calling for "Sholto" in a loud, angry voice, and the poor clown was obliged to go.

When the evening came, with its rosy flush over land and sea, Nellie was still lying where they had put her,

her hand clasped in her father's, while the setting sun gave a faint glow to her cheeks, otherwise very pale.

"Father—when will it be high tide?" she asked faintly.

"I don't know—soon—about six o'clock I think."

"Father, it says that in Heaven there shall be no more sea! I think that seems a pity, don't you?"

"I don't know, Nellie," muttered her father, in a broken voice, "we don't know much about it."

"No—but perhaps there is something better still—something that will make us quite, quite satisfied without the sea. Don't you think so, father?"

"I dare say, dear."

"I wonder what it will be," said Nellie, and then she was silent for some time.

"I can hear the sea so plainly, father," she said at last.

"Can you, dearie?" But *he* could not—they were too far from the shore.

"I hear it rushing—it sounds quite close! It must be a very high tide, father."

"Oh! Nellie! Nellie!" cried her father, breaking down and covering his face with his hands.

"Listen! it is talking to me—about my white dress. I shall have it, father—I shall have it—"

She raised herself suddenly and looked up with a sweet, beaming smile, and then her eyes closed, and she fell back into her father's arms.

Nellie's next dress *was* a white one, but it was the pure, white robe of an angel.



CHAPTER XXVI.

A GREAT MANY THINGS.

THE Cottage is, in a short time, sufficiently in order for the younger children to return, but both Mr. and Mrs. Meadows beg to be allowed to keep Sue for a little while longer.

The last letters from Aunt Cosy have said that Uncle Jeff is much worse, and a day or two after, comes a letter with the much-dreaded black border, to say that Aunt Cosy is a widow. She tells her brother that she intends to return to him as soon as possible, and one evening, as they are all sitting in the twilight, she arrives.

How glad they are to see her back again, and how their loving faces comfort her sad heart ! Sue has returned home as soon as Uncle Jeff's death is known, and is glad to see that her aunt's room is as comfortable and bright as a fire can make it.

They are all glad to find that Aunt Cosy is just the same as ever—they have been half afraid that she will be very different, but the white cap and black dress are the

only changes, except that at times her eyes fill with tears which the little ones try to kiss away.

There is so much to tell, and so much to hear, that it is long before all the news is told, and not the least astonishing part is the transformation in Miss Griggs. From Miss Griggs herself, Aunt Cosy hears the story of Mr. West's escape from the shipwreck, of the vessel that picked up the boat's crew after two days' starvation, and a few other details of the search he had made for her. Aunt Cosy is a good listener, and makes Miss Griggs very happy by the interest she shows in the romantic story.

When Dr. Rutherford begins to consult Aunt Cosy about his plans, and ask hers, she makes a most delightful suggestion to him, which is that *she* shall take Miss Griggs's place when that lady leaves them, and that Susan and Floss should have masters from the school, to teach French, German, and Music. Aunt Cosy thinks it will be better for the girls, and feels she will have greater influence over the younger children if she is more thorough with them. The girls will also learn much better from a master, and she knows enough to assist them in preparing their lessons. Dr. Rutherford is very grateful to his sister, but does not like her giving so much of her time to his children; but Mrs. Turrell assures him that the more she is employed, the happier she is, for then she has no time for grieving, and the great wish of her life is to be useful. Val has gone back to school and is now only seen at breakfast and supper. His friendship with Jack Hartley prospers, and the result is that a better understanding is established between the Maskellites and the Grammarians, for Val's example has always been

followed by the other boys, and he begins to feel the responsibility of doing what is right himself, in order not to lead others wrong.

The next excitement in the family is Miss Griggs's wedding. Mr. West takes rooms in the town, in order to be near the Cottage, and they are married at the parish church, Dr. Rutherford giving the bride away, while Floss and Eve attend in white frocks in the capacity of bridesmaids. It is not much of a wedding, the children think, for Miss Griggs (very sensibly) is married in her simple grey travelling dress, and there is no wedding breakfast, for the bride drives away with her husband from the church door, Val pelting them with rice as they go.

When they come home, Val announces that a wedding is very poor fun after all, and he means to be a bachelor all his life.

"Ah!" says his father laughing; "I said the same at your age. I remember when my brother Tom married, I made him almost angry by saying that I would never waste my money on a wife and a lot of children. And now Tom has two children, and I have eight!"

"You might have got rid of some of us in the fire, father," says Sue, knowing well what the answer will be.

"So I might, but I couldn't make up my mind which of you to leave behind," retorts the doctor with twinkling eyes; "but that fire was a dreadful thing for me in one way. I always knew I had a large family, but I never thoroughly realised it until I counted you over in the Park House drawing-room. Then it *did* seem to me that there were an appalling number of you, and I began to envy Meadows his one chick."

This brings the whole wrath of the family upon the doctor, and Sue is so angry, that she has to go and kiss him as a punishment.

"And then," continues Dr. Rutherford, catching Sue's hands, "as if there were not enough of you already, Sue must add *another* to the number, and include Justin in the family as an adopted brother."

"Why, papa! You know you are very fond of Justin."

"So I am, my dear, but it does not follow that I wanted to add him to my family. Have you heard from that boy since he went away?"

"Of course, father! you read his last letter yesterday and said it was very clever. I shall tell the boys what you have been saying when next I write."

"You are very welcome. Like the Duchess in 'Alice in Wonderland,' I make you a present of all that I have said! Val, have you seen Jack lately?"

Val looks up with a start.

"N—no, father, not as much as usual. I just met him yesterday, but he was going home."

"Is he keeping steady?"

"I suppose so, father; at least—I don't know."

"Ah! well, ask him to come to supper to-morrow night. I want to have a little talk with him."

Val answers promptly, "Yes, father," though it is evident that he does not much like the task, but Dr. Rutherford has turned away and is tossing Eve to her intense delight, and does not notice Val's reluctance.

Then the doctor goes away and Aunt Cosy establishes order and quiet, Eve goes to the nursery, Val to his lessons, and Sue to the piano.

Next day Val appears alone after school, and answers his father's exclamation, "What has become of Jack?" saying shortly,

"He wouldn't come. He said he had to go somewhere else."

"Did you tell him I wanted to see him?"

"Yes, father."

"Did you ask him to come any other night?"

"No, father."

"Then ask him to come here the first evening he can want to see him. Tell him he must come."

"Very well, father, but I'm afraid he won't."

"Why? what is the matter? Have you and Jack been quarrelling?"

"Not exactly, sir, but we haven't spoken lately—and know he won't come."

"May I ask the reason of this silence between you?"

"Oh! no, father," and Val looks very much distressed.

"Well, I trust it is nothing to *your* discredit, Val. But I am anxious about Jack Hartley, and I had hoped that our friendship might have done much for him, and kept him straight. Of course if he has rejoined his old companions, I do not blame you for leaving him. I should be sorry indeed for my son to become one of that set. It you said yesterday that you supposed he was going quite steadily. I wish you would tell me what it is about."

"Oh! no, father, I *can't*. Please don't ask me," and Val is only reassured by his father's,

"Very well, I must trust you then."

But time goes on, and Jack Hartley does not come to

supper, so at last Dr. Rutherford goes to find him, at an hour when he thinks the boy is sure to be at home.

Yes, Jack is in, and comes at once to see his visitor. And then, point blank, Dr. Rutherford asks why Jack will not come and see him. The boy colours, and is silent, then he looks up and says frankly,

"Because of Val. We're neither of us right and neither of us wrong. I haven't done anything to be ashamed of, only Val has misunderstood me. Don't ask about it, sir, please, and it will come right in time."

"But why should it be left to time? He is a very poor doctor in some cases! If you will tell me, I can probably put it all right at once. If Val has misunderstood you, and you are neither of you to blame, is it not better for a third person to decide between you?"

"Val did not choose to believe me," says Jack rather unwillingly; "he was very angry and would not listen—and some of the other boys—one in particular—told him lies, and he believed *them*."

"Well, come to supper with me to-morrow, mind I won't let you off, and we will make this misunderstanding quite clear. Remember, you must come to-morrow."

And Jack, with evident reluctance, promises to come.



CHAPTER XXVII.

"THE TONGUE IS A FIRE."

WHEN Valentine and Jack Hartley meet on their way to the Cottage, after school, no formal greeting passes between them ; Val merely says scornfully,

"Then you *are* coming !"

And Jack answers, "Yes."

They walk along side by side for some minutes, but nothing more is said until Val exclaims,

"What do you mean to do?"

"I don't know. I shall *have* to say, I suppose."

"You shall *not* !"

"I must, if your father makes me."

"It is bad enough to have had you inventing suchanders, but then to tell *him* ; you shall not do it, Jack, and you sha'nt come to supper unless you promise only to tell what I choose him to know."

"How will you stop me?"

"Never mind ! Will you promise?"

"No ! I shall not promise you anything. You have

chosen to disbelieve me, to take the word of those—those *fellows*—sooner than mine, you have treated me, as no one but your father's son should do, without a thrashing from me, and now you ask me to promise not to speak, except just the words you may put into my mouth. I won't be dictated to any longer, Val, so you may do your worst !”

“Well, you heard what I said ?”

“I've heard too much,” exclaims Jack with flashing eyes ; “if you were not Dr. Rutherford's son, I wouldn't have stood *half* as much from you. Why, how can you have the face to ask me not to speak, when you disbelieve what I tell you ! If I could tell you a lie once, I could again, and I might give the promise and then break it. As you wouldn't trust me before, you sha'n't trust me now.”

“Look here, Jack,” begins Val in a different tone, “your telling my father will do no good. It *can't* make me believe what I know cannot be true, and it may give him a great deal of pain. You know I have a witness, who is ready to prove what I say, James Fincham.”

“Yes, *Fincham* ! The greatest liar and coward in the whole Grammar school ! I know—” but Jack suddenly shuts his lips firmly, and is silent.

“Well, I saw him first in your company,” retorts Val.

“Yes, I know you did. I wish you hadn't—I wish we had both of us never seen Fincham. He has done *harm* enough in every way. Oh ! you don't know—but I *do*, what that young brute is capable of !”

“You were with him on the bridge that day, when you did your best to kill me, and frightened Ted to death.”

Jack's face becomes very white, but he does not reply. Fincham says it was you who threw that stone at me, that was why you were so submissive all of a sudden Justin caught you. You were trying to back out of and throw the blame on the others. I don't know about -Fincham *may* be wrong, but there's no telling now." "Yes, there is," answers Jack hotly—he has borne a deal from Val, and his patience is now exhausted. Fincham could tell you that of me, he shall find that a match for him. By good luck here he comes, and ! Now we will see who is right and who is wrong." Jack waits till his enemy is close to him, then he makes unexpected spring on the great lout before them, and presses him over into the road. The next moment, he has secured the other boy's hands behind him with pocket-handkerchief, and James Fincham is a prisoner. "Now look here, Fincham, don't squall and we won't hurt you. Just you come along quietly, and it will be all the better for you," remarks Jack. "Where are you going to take me?" asks Fincham in terror, but Jack merely says, "Never mind, you'll see soon enough." To the Cottage he is marched, regardless of his enemies and promises to tell the whole truth if Jack will let him go. When they arrive, Dr. Rutherford, being at home, calls James into his study and shuts the door. The first he does is to order Fincham's hands to be released, to command Jack accordingly obeys, and Fincham is pressed a corner, looking miserable, frightened and savage. Dr. Rutherford, I've been obliged to bring that fellow

here, though I'm sorry for it," says Jack. "He is James Fincham, the one who has started all this trouble. *He* has told Val stories about me which are untrue, he has tried to put his own horrid doings off upon me, and he is altogether a wretched creature!"

"But, my dear Jack, I don't understand what you are talking about," says Dr. Rutherford. "I must hear this from the beginning. Now, Val, you tell me what has been wrong between you."

"Well, about a fortnight ago, as I was coming home, I heard some of the boys talking together, and they were talking about you, father, so I—I—"

"Listened," puts in the doctor smiling, "well?"

"I *heard* what they said, father, for I was walking behind them, and it was dusk. I did not *stop* to hear them, and they were talking loud. They said things of you—lies that I won't repeat, Fincham knows them, so does Jack, for *Jack* was one of them!"

The doctor glances sharply at Jack, who retorts,

"I was *not*!"

"They went on, until I could bear it no longer, and I rushed in among them, and gave them something to remember me by. Then I heard them call out Jack's name, which proves he was one of them, and what is more, the next day I met him going to school with a bruise on his forehead, which I have no doubt I had given him—and serve him right. Fincham told me he was there, he had seen him with the boys, and he told me about Ted and the snowball too."

Jack has had hard work to remain silent all this time, but as Val stops he breaks in.

"You said you'd believe me once before, Dr. Rutherford, and I've done nothing since to forfeit your good opinion. I was going home that same evening, and I heard Fincham telling some stories about you and the boys, saying that it had been done on purpose, and such absurd things, that I went into a rage and tried to fight him, though he had the other boys with him. But they were the best of it, and Fincham ran home, after giving me a blow over the eye, which Val saw next morning as I went to school. I suppose when Val, a little later that same evening, set upon the boys for talking, they thought he had come back, and that was why they called out my name. So Fincham had just a shadow of truth in what he said when he told Val that I had been with the boys, because they were the boys who helped him, that Val wished for repeating Fincham's tales."

"Is Jack Hartley's story true?" asks Dr. Rutherford, looking at the boy, who shuffles his feet on the floor and makes no answer.

Then Jack Hartley continues eagerly,

"He also told Val that it was I who threw the snowball with the stone in it, which hurt him so much. I didn't do it, *indeed* I didn't, Val. I know who did it, and Fincham knows too. Ask him if I really threw the snowball, and he will not dare say yes."

Then Dr. Rutherford once more turns to Fincham, and looks steadily at him, saying,

"Is this true?" and again he receives no answer.

"Why, Fincham, you told me—you *know* you told me that you had seen Jack throw it—you *know* you told me that Jack had said that father set fire to the Cottage

to spite the landlord or to cheat the insurance offices, or something of the kind," and Val looks for a moment much dismayed.

"You have been misled, it seems, Val, and have trusted and doubted in the wrong places," says his father, after watching Fincham for a moment. "You have been too hasty in condemning Jack, without properly considering the case. And now, boys, remember this. I have no care as to what tales a boy like this may invent about me. Of course I do care for the good opinion of those around me, but when I cease to respect any one, I also cease to care for their opinion of me, whether bad or good. I want no one to defend my good name, not even *you*, Val; what I do want is to see you able to command yourself, and pass such slanders by as they deserve, with silent contempt. And now let me see you shake hands with Jack, for he has been very patient with you, Val, and received a black eye for defending your father."

There is no difficulty in making this reconciliation, for both boys are only too ready to become friends again.

"There is one other thing I should like to say to you both," continues Dr. Rutherford. "You know I have not been hard on either of you when you have come to me in your scrapes, but you were neither of you liars or slanderers; and to take away the character of another, by inventing tales which will be repeated and believed by the ill-natured, is perhaps the lowest and meanest of all vices. You see this boy, and you know what he has done. I shall be seriously displeased with you, Val, if you ever speak to him again, and as for you, Jack, I am sure you know too much of him ever to treat him as a friend.

Now, go and join the others, I want to speak to Fincham before he goes away."

This is more than the wretched boy has calculated on, and he rises stammering that he must go—he can't stay—they will want him at home. But Dr. Rutherford merely lays his hand on the boy's shoulder, and though the touch is very light, he immediately stands perfectly still.

"I want to ask you before you go, what reason you had for inventing stories about me. Had I ever done anything to harm you?"

"No, sir."

"Had you ever heard of my doing anything to a friend of yours, which made you angry with me?"

"No, sir."

"Then what was your object in slandering me?"

"I—I—I don't know."

"You had no object at all?"

Then at last comes out,

"They were always praising you—and—and I thought I'd make 'em stop."

"Thank you, now at any rate you have spoken the truth. I am sorry, Fincham, that there is very little to be said in extenuation of your conduct in this matter. You seem to have cherished in your heart that 'envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness,' against which we pray to be delivered in the Litany. You are one of those who, if you have the chance, will throw your handfuls of mud and slime upon the names of the very heroes of the world—there are others like you! What you have said of me is nothing, I only look at the

supper, so at last Dr. Rutherford goes to find him, at an hour when he thinks the boy is sure to be at home.

Yes, Jack is in, and comes at once to see his visitor. And then, point blank, Dr. Rutherford asks why Jack will not come and see him. The boy colours, and is silent, then he looks up and says frankly,

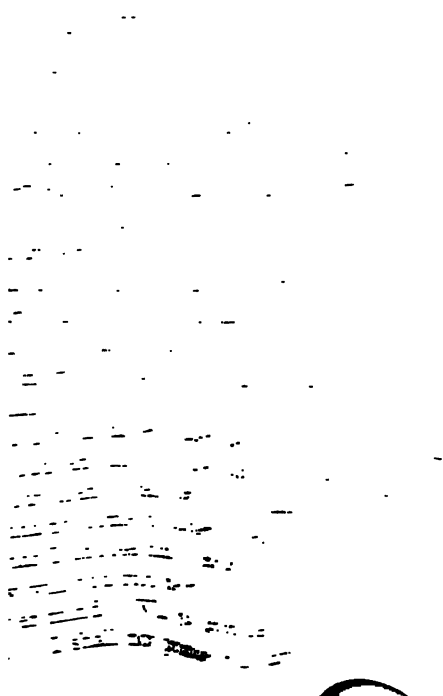
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"But why should it be left to time? He is a very poor doctor in some cases! If you will tell me, I can probably put it all right at once. If Val has misunderstood you, and you are neither of you to blame, is it not better for a third person to decide between you?"

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"Well, come to supper with me to-morrow, mind I won't let you off, and we will make this misunderstanding quite clear. Remember, you must come to-morrow."

And Jack, with evident reluctance, promises to come.



character it betrays in you. If I saw one trace of sorrow, one sign of regret in your manner, I would not speak so harshly, but from me at least you shall hear the truth. Remember this—when you slander any one, you do yourself *twice* the harm you do to them, you leave a stain on your own character far deeper than any you can inflict on another's, you lower *yourself* far more than you lower them. Let that be a warning to you for the future. Now you can go." Dr. Rutherford shows the boy out with a grave politeness which would produce some softening effect on a less hardened youth.

But all the impression Fincham carries away is that he had a horrid fright and a "slanging" from the doctor, and so, cowed and crestfallen, he slinks home.

That evening Aunt Cosy reads them her last story called "Rags."



Rags.

PART I.

"E, move on, can't you?" said the policeman, with a sort of rough kindness; "move on, little girl, mustn't stay here."

It had been "moving on" all day, and she was very, very tired, but though she was only seven years old, she had great respect for the tall policemen who ordered her to move on, and so she never ventured to disobey.

It was a dismal day enough, but that did not make any difference to little Bess, all days were dismal to her, with rain, and hunger, and dirt, and "moving on."

She got up from the doorstep where she had been sitting and shuffled on, dragging her little feet wearily after the other. Anything more wretched and forlorn she looked, could hardly be imagined.

Her coat would scarcely keep together and showed the many holes, a soiled and equally ragged skirt and bodice. One sleeve was completely gone, torn away below the elbow. Half an old

shawl was pinned over her, but it was too thin to keep out the wind that blew sharply round the corners of the streets, while the straw hat had long ago parted from its brim, and was only kept on by a strip of flannel tied down under the chin.

She had no stockings, but a pair of boots that were full of holes, and as they would have fitted feet twice the size of Bess's, they were stuffed with rags to prevent their falling off. However, they protected her from the cold pavement, so though they were heavy and very awkward, and added greatly to her weariness, she was glad to wear them.

"Oh dear! I *am* tired," sighed poor Bess. She was a long way from home—or rather the place where she crept for shelter at night, for she was a homeless little one, and had nobody to care for her.

A woman, usually called "Old Nanny," looked after her, whenever looking after was absolutely necessary, that is to say, she turned Bess out of the house in the morning with a blow and a crust of bread, and received her at night with the same.

Sometimes, however, if Bess were fortunate, and some lady took pity on her and gave her a little money, Nanny would be extra kind, and (after taking away the money) give her a little bit of dripping or rancid butter on her crust, or perhaps a bit of cold and heavy suet pudding, that her own children could not eat.

Bess was not an ugly child, in spite of the dirt and rags that disguised her as much as possible. She had tangled, golden hair and frank blue eyes, that looked straight into the faces, and often into the hearts of those who spoke to her.

The courtyard in which Bess lived was full of men, and women, and children as wretched and dirty as herself, but somehow, Bess thought, they did not seem to mind the wretchedness as much as she did.

The children had (most of them) parents, who, though rough and careless, would still protect them from other people and children ; but Bess had no one to protect her. It did not matter to Old Nanny how much Bess got teased and slapped, how often the morning's crust was snatched from the hand of the hungry little child, or she was pinched for being ugly, knocked down for getting in the way, or slapped for daring to be there at all.

No one ever stopped to pick her up or to ask if she were hurt when she fell, there was only a jeering laugh from some of the bigger children, who were not slow in finding out that "Old Nanny's Bess" was alone and unprotected in the world, and consequently made her the butt and scapegoat of the yard.

Yet, outside the yard, the child found some protection and often sympathy. The tall policemen did not frighten her, as they did the big boys who hung about the alleys ; they (unconsciously perhaps) softened their voices to the weary, blue-eyed child, who gave no trouble, and obeyed with only a sigh. They had even interfered once or twice when her tormentors had pursued her into the street beyond the yard ; and so Bess looked upon them as her friends, in spite of the dreaded order to "move on."

The rain had been pouring down for some hours, but now it was clearing up, and the sun began to send forth a few rather watery gleams, before retiring for the night.

Bess wandered on, not much caring which way she

went, she had no object in going one way more than another at that moment.

She would not dare show her face to Old Nanny for another two or three hours, but she was damp, and cold, and hungry, three things which are bad enough in themselves, but to have them all at once is a very dreadful thing, as poor Bess knew only too well.

As she walked along a quiet street, she heard merry voices on the other side of a high wall, and coming to a barred iron gate, she looked in. There were a number of children playing in a small square, little girls like herself, and bigger girls, and girls of fourteen and fifteen, and they were all dressed alike in dark blue frocks with white aprons, looking as clean, and fresh, and happy as any twenty children in England.

Some were swinging in a large swing at one end of the play-ground, some were skipping, others were tossing balls, some were walking round arm in arm talking earnestly together, others were having a noisy game of romps in one corner, trying to catch each other, running, pursuing, dodging, and laughing ; and all were happy.

Bess stood looking at them, quite fascinated, wondering how they all came there, whether they could be sisters, or if it was a school, and whether those blue frocks were as nice and warm as they looked.

She wondered, also, what they had for breakfast and dinner, and thought it must be something good, they looked so satisfied, so rosy, and so healthy.

And the poor little hungry child leant her head against the gate and cried with envy, wishing herself one of them.

Suddenly she felt a push, a voice told her to get out of

way, and on turning she saw a tall footman standing
t, and a carriage with a lady inside, was drawn up
ore the gate. The bell rang loudly and Bess shrank
ck as the gate was opened and the lady went in. Then
pleasant-faced woman appeared on the steps of the
ouse and clapped her hands twice, on which all the
children marched in doors walking two and two, and the
door shut after them.

Bess did not wait any longer. She shuffled away towards
Old Nanny's, her little head full of wonder and surprise.

But everything did not seem quite so dismal as before,
and when at last she reached Nanny's home, and lay
down on the heap of straw that was her bed, she did not
dread the next day as much as she usually did, but rather
looked forward to it, because she meant to go again and
look in at that beautiful play-ground, and watch those
happy, merry-looking children in their nice blue frocks
and white aprons.

How much Bess wished she had a blue frock like those !

Bess dreamt that night she was one of those children
and played in that nice ground. It was a dreadful dis-
appointment to wake up after that !

PART II.

From that time, day after day, little Bess crept out to
the iron gate.

Some days it rained, and the children did not come
out, but several times when the weather was fine, they
had all appeared walking two and two through the gate
and passed down the street, the pleasant-looking woman
walking with the youngest.

Bess had followed them a little way, but she was afraid of being noticed, so she had run back, and waited until they returned.

When this had happened two or three times, the kind-looking woman, who walked with the children, began to notice Bess, and one day she stopped and would have spoken, only the child ran away in a fright. She was afraid the woman might forbid her to look in at the gate, which was the first and only pleasure she had known during the seven sad years of her little life.

She found, from watching the house, that once a week the same lady came in a grand carriage and went into the house for about half an hour. Bess wondered what she did there, and whether she went because she liked seeing those nice, happy children as much as the poor little out-cast did.

She heard some people calling the house a "Home" one day, and that made her wonder whether every one had a home, except herself—she knew the beautiful lady had one, for every time she stepped into her carriage on leaving the house, she said "home," to the tall footman, who touched his hat, and then they all drove away.

Bess used to try and imagine what the lady's home could be like ; she was sure it must be a very beautiful place, perhaps almost as beautiful as the "Home" where these children lived and looked so happy.

The days grew shorter and colder, and the tattered frock and thin half shawl could not keep out the bitter north-east wind, and little Bess had to run up and down in front of the gate, to keep herself from getting stiff with the cold.

The lady wrapped herself in soft dark fur, while the man and footman wore funny, fluffy capes that were very warm and comfortable.

The children in the "Home" had thick linsey dresses and long grey cloaks, that to poor half-frozen Bess looked like no cutting wind could *ever* get through them.

When the snow sometimes fell, and there was ice in the gutter, but still little Bess loved to linger round the gate and try to catch a glimpse of the comfort and brightness within. One day, when the snow was falling, Bess felt so stiff when she tried to move, that when the lady's carriage came, she was nearly knocked down by the footman as he ran up to ring the bell.

"Pray be more careful, William," said the lady gently; "hope you have not hurt the little girl."

"No, my lady, I think not. She's always round here when you come, my lady."

"Is she? Tell her to come and speak to me, William."

But Bess was much too shy to let William come near, so she ran away and hid herself.

When the lady went into the Home, she asked the matron whether she had noticed the child who stood so long looking in at the gate. The matron (who was the stern-looking woman that walked out with the children) answered that they had all noticed her, and she had once tried to speak to the child, but she ran away and seemed afraid of them.

"Poor little one! I wonder who she can be," said the lady. "I should like to find out something about her, perhaps we might help her. There is room for another child in the Home as Mary is leaving."

"I was thinking of that the other day," said the matron; "only the little girl seems so shy and frightened that she runs away the moment any of us go near her."

"We must watch for her," said the lady, "and then send Alice, or one of the little ones to beg her to come in. She will not be afraid of the children, I think."

And so they waited for an opportunity, but it seemed hopeless; Bess always fled from them, for being accustomed to ill-treatment all her life, she could not believe that they meant to do her good.

And so, without knowing it, Bess was running away from her best friends.

One day Old Nanny was crosser than ever, and it was with a harder blow than usual that she dismissed poor little Bess into the yard. Her piece of bread was quickly seized upon by a big boy, so that Bess could only sob bitter tears of grief and anger, as she shuffled along the slippery, frozen pavement. When at last she reached the iron gate, she sank down on the step, exhausted by cold and hunger, and clasped her arms round one of the cold iron bars.

The snow fell softly and lightly over and around her, but she did not heed it now, for she was beginning to feel sleepy, oh! so very sleepy, and leaning her head on her arm, she sat there until she fell soundly asleep and forgot all her troubles, her hunger, cold and misery, Old Nanny, and the falling snow.

If little Bess had slept much longer on that cold step, she would have been frozen to death. Happily, however, the lady drove up in her carriage, and there they found her. Gentle hands unclasped her little arms from the

iron bar, and gentle arms lifted and carried her into Home.

He was quite cold, and stiff, and numbed, and for a time they could not rouse her from that deep and dreamful sleep. But at last she opened her eyes and looked round her in surprise, but to those who watched it seemed as if she must have dreamt some dream like this before, for she shut her eyes again with a little sigh. But it could not be a dream that some one was lifting gently, and holding a cup of warm milk to her lips, could the kindly hands that rubbed her frozen limbs, the reassuring pat on her shoulder, and the tender words, "Don't be afraid, my child, we are going to take care of you," be entirely her fancy.

"Where am I, please?" she asked, trying to look about the room, and it was with a flush of happiness that she heard the words,

"You are in our Home."

There were a great many beds in the room where she was, and at night a great many little girls came and lay in them. Bess heard them say their prayers, for the Matron sat close to her bed, and the little ones came and knelt at her knee.

Then, before she left the room, the kind Matron came, bending over Bess, said gently,

"Would not this little girl like to say a prayer too?"

Now Bess had never said prayers, she had never been told what to say, but she had heard these children say them, and she had noticed that they all asked for something; they seemed to want very much.

She knew well enough what *she* most earnestly wished,

so putting her hands together as she had seen the others do, she said softly,

"Please, God, let me stay in this nice place. Amen."

Then the Matron kissed her, and Bess slept that night warm and comfortable and safe in the Home for little orphan girls.

Bess *was* allowed to stay in the Home, and so her first little prayer was granted. Before long, she had one of the warm linsey dresses and long grey cloaks that she had so much admired, and might play and swing in the square play-ground with the other children.

Old Nanny, when she was asked about Bess, was willing enough to get rid of her, and the kind people were very glad to keep her. She was always very grateful and obedient in the Home, and she soon found out why the beautiful lady in the carriage came so often.

She was a very rich lady, and having so much money, she liked to give some of it to those who were poor; so she built this nice Home for little girls who have none of their own.

Every week she goes to see them and hears what they have done, and how they have behaved. When they have done well and been good, she is pleased, and when they have been naughty, she is sorry, and goes away looking very grave.

As the children all love her, and like to please her, and see her smile at them, they try and do their best to please her, though sometimes they forget, like all children.

Bess has learnt to read and write, and to knit stockings, and what is still more important, she is learning to do what is right, and to avoid what is wrong.

She has grown so strong and well, and has quite a colour in her cheeks, while her pretty hair shines like gold.

Old Nanny would not know her again if she saw her, nor would the boy who used to snatch away her crusts of bread.

And best of all, the kind lady has promised that Bess shall never again be without a home as long as she is a good girl, and she will never again be obliged to walk about the streets in rags.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONVERSATIONS.

SUE is very glad that the coldness between Valentine and Jack has come to an end. She welcomes them both when they come into the drawing-room, and Aunt Cosy is amused to hear how much schoolboy slang Sue knows, and what an interest she takes in the Maskellites and the Grammarians and their feuds.

She makes one effort to find out the cause of Val and Jack's quarrel, but neither of the boys will tell, and Sue wisely does not tease them with questions.

They are very merry this evening, and after Jack has gone home, Floss (who has been allowed to "sit up") announces in a pensive tone,

"I think Jack's a very nice boy. Justin is nice, but he's *rather* old, and I think if I had an adopted brother, like Sue, it should be Jack Hartley."

But Dr. Rutherford quickly interposes.

"No, no ! no more brothers. I can't have my family increased in this alarming manner. There are nine of

Justin, Floss, and I can have no more. If you want to add to your relations, you can adopt a few cousins or uncles and aunts."

"It is very absurd, this idea of *adopting* relations," says Val rather scornfully.

"Very," answers his father, "if it is merely done for a silly freak, or to increase the number of one's relations. But if it is done in the spirit in which Sue adopted Justin, that is another matter. A true spirit of love, brotherly and sisterly love, such as the early Christians spoke of and practised among themselves, is a different thing, and I do not think we shall ever repent Sue's somewhat rash but wholly unselfish proposition to adopt Justin, and make him as much at home here among us, as in his own silent, lonely home."

"I think, papa," says Sue, looking up from her work, "that any one might feel proud of having a brother like Justin. I often wish that he was my own *real* brother, because then I might feel prouder still."

"I doubt if Justin ever wishes that. It is one thing to be a wealthy only son, adopted into a large family, and another to be the eldest of nine, heir to nothing but an honest name and a good constitution. By the by, Val, you were beginning to tell me the other day what you are going to choose as a profession. Of course you *want* to be a soldier, as you are the son of a poor man, who can't afford to send you into the army."

"Yes, father, I want to be a soldier and fight, but my enemy shall not be my own fellow-creatures, but the great enemy, Death. I want to be a surgeon."

"Hullo! This is a change. Have you had enough

of fighting lately, that you prefer healing wounds to giving them?"

"Well, you see, father, I have noticed lately how much more good a doctor or a surgeon can do to their fellow-creatures than most men in other professions, and I think I'd rather cure people than kill them."

"Some people will tell you that with doctors it is much the same thing as with soldiers, in fact, that a doctor kills more people than a soldier, for he works in times of peace as well as war. But I will say nothing to damp your ardour, Val, and if you choose a profession from a good motive, and always set yourself a high standard by which to rule your conduct, you will be successful enough, I have no doubt."

"I think I should like to go into a convent," says Floss, and is rather pleased at the consternation of her family at such an announcement.

"I think, Flossikin, you had better go to bed," says her father smiling; "there is nothing like sleep for getting rid of such fancies."

Then he leans back in his chair and looks at Sue through his half closed eyes.

"And what is my daughter going to be? since we are on the subject of the future."

He looks to see whether Sue has any visions of her future destiny, as her clear, child's eyes meet his.

"I am going to be your daughter, papa, and take care of your house for you, and look after Eve and Phyllis, and you will find me *so* useful!"

"I find that now, if not in keeping my house, in making home bright and pleasant to me. Sue, do you

remember the sad young lady who used to let the fires go out, and keep her father waiting for his tea?"

"Oh, papa!"

"And whose chief topic of conversation was the misconduct of all her brothers and sisters; eh, Sue?"

"Oh! papa, how naughty of you to remember that! It seems so very, very long ago—quite in the dark ages! But Aunt Cosy helped me to think them all very different, because she was always so very patient and gentle with them herself. She is such a good sister to you, and I should like to be just such a good sister to *my* brothers."

"I hope, Sue, for their sakes, they will never want your good offices as I have wanted Aunt Cosy's," says Dr. Rutherford, thinking of his little, motherless ones, asleep in their cribs upstairs. "But you could wish for no sphere in life more useful than that of a good sister. Your influence for good may be boundless, and you should learn to use it with judgment."

"And not preach too many sermons, Sue," says Val, looking up with twinkling eyes; "though I verily believe it is three whole days since you have given me much of a scolding."

"Ah! I don't scold you half as much as you deserve," answers Sue, for she has learnt not to take offence at Val's speeches; "I always look upon my advice as words thrown away."

"Yet I have known good advice cast like bread upon the waters and found after many days," says Dr. Rutherford. "I had very little hope of doing Jack Hartley any good, when I used to see him after he was so ill, and I was not surprised when I heard that he had broken his

promise to me, and gone back to his old ways. And yet those words I spoke were always in his mind, and 'after many days' they brought forth their fruit. The great thing is to know the 'time to keep silence' and the 'time to speak.' However good the words, if spoken in the 'time to keep silence,' they are sure to do more harm than good."

"Father, you ought to have been a clergyman," says Val, "you would have preached such nice, interesting sermons."

"It is not always a clergyman's sermon that is listened to most attentively, Val, and you will learn later that a doctor is often called upon to speak some words of advice or comfort, quite apart from the ordinary, medical point of view. The influence of the clergyman is small compared to the influence of the doctor, if he only understands how to use it."

There is a silence, then Sue remarks,

"I wonder what Justin is going to be."

"'Everything by turns and nothing long,' " quotes Dr. Rutherford. "He will have plenty of hobbies, and ride them all pretty hard for a time, but he will be wanting to do too much—he will try to regenerate the world, and that is usually an ungrateful task. Has he no plans of any kind?"

"Yes," exclaims Val laughing, "you should have heard him one day, father! He said he should become a solicitor, and take poor people's cases for nothing, because at present law was so hard and so expensive for the poor. Then he thought of being an engineer, and working out a better system of drainage, and water supply for

the cottages on the estate ; then he thought he would be an architect, and build model cottages from his own plans, for his tenants. Rupert laughed at every suggestion and said it would end in his being a mere farmer and county squire, and having no profession at all, but Justin declares that *some* trade, if not profession, he will have."

"He is very wise, there is nothing so miserable and so inclined to selfishness and indulgence as an idle man. But I foresee you will have your hands full, Sue, if you intend to keep this brother of yours in order."

"I am not afraid, papa."

"Brave girl ! If you are to be the confidante of draining schemes, cottage building, or cheap law for the poor, I wish you joy !"

"But that is not all, father," says Val ; "Justin also thought of writing a book about the peasants of England, and another about the Poor Laws. He also thinks of offering himself at the next available election, after he comes of age, as a representative of our small borough in Parliament, and there he intends to make a fine noise. But he won't let me call him a Radical—not even a Liberal ! He says, 'I should try to do my best for my *country*—parties be hanged !' He said that really, father. I wish you had heard him."

"I wish I had, Val, for I should have answered 'Amen' with all my heart to that. And now good night, for it is getting late."



CHAPTER XXIX.

HOLIDAYS AGAIN.

EASTER is late this year, but for all that, it is fast drawing near, and there is much looking forward with joy to Rupert and Justin's return.

April has already begun to show her flowers when they come home. The Meadows' carriage fetches them both from the station, but Justin only leaves Rupert at the gate, and drives on without coming in, as he knows how impatient his father will be to see him. However, he sends a message to say that he will be in that evening to "pay his respects" to the family.

Rupert has grown much since he left home, he looks a little thinner, and his legs are *very* long. He looks well and very happy, and is satisfied to find that they are inclined to make the very most of him, and even Floss seems quite excited at his return.

Val has much to confide very privately to Rupert, which is done as the latter unpacks, which consists of dragging his clothes, books, &c., from his portmanteau and flinging them on the bed.

Indignant murmurs are heard at one time, and then a lause from Rupert, and a shout of "Three cheers for k !" until at last Sue grows impatient, and knocks at door.

"May I come in, if you are not talking secrets?" she s with becoming meekness.

"Certainly," says Rupert.

"No, you can't," says Val, and then there is a pause.

"Well, what am I to do?" asks Sue, waiting for further ers.

"Come in and shut the door," says Rupert, "I'll wer for her, Val, she is A r at keeping a secret. I've d her several, and she has never breathed a word of e of them. Here, sit down, Sukey," and he clears a ur for her and pulls it forward. "Now, fire away, l."

And then Sue hears some of the scene which took ce in her father's room, in which Fincham played such contemptible part. From what she hears, she can her the rest, and fills in the gaps with wonderful uracy.

"Now, mind you never betray that you know this," s Val, addressing Sue with great decision in his tone d manner, "because, don't you see, though I can tell pert, as my elder brother, it's very different telling rthing to a girl!"

Sue fails to understand the niceness of the distinction, : promises inviolable secrecy, so Val is satisfied. And r supper Justin comes.

Sue is listening to Rupert, her back is towards the or, and she does not hear him come in, and is un-

conscious of his presence, until two hands are placed on her shoulders, and his voice says,

"Well, Sister Sue, have you nothing to say to me?"

Yes, Sue has heaps, but that moment she cannot speak a word, and can only answer his frank brotherly greeting with a silent pressure of his hand, and as she sits down again, and he takes the chair beside her, after his other greetings are over, she looks the perfect picture of happiness.

Then Rupert has to show him how his room has been rebuilt since the fire, and what has been done to the house in the way of repairs, and there is so much to tell on both sides, that it is late before half has been said.

Next morning when Sue looks from her window, she sees the flag up with an invitation to her to come over to the Park House, and accordingly she goes, accompanied by Rupert and Val.

At the Park House there is even more to see than at the rebuilt Cottage. There is a new aviary at the end of the conservatory, built for Justin during his absence, and which he is going to stock with birds. His own room has also been altered, and a bow window added, which improves the look of the room, and gives him more space. A charming room it is, though perhaps a little too luxurious for a boy of his age, but with wealthy and adoring parents, it is difficult to draw the line between comfort and luxury. Fortunately Justin has too much spirit and energy to sink into a mere lover of ease. Then there are his new books, such an array! And the nice new shelves that have been put up for them, and the armchair in which to sit and read them, and the lamp on a little

able, and the gas by the fire-place, and the two or three beautiful old prints that hang on the walls. Everything is new and delightful to the Rutherfords, and Justin shows his room with some pride, not because it is nicer than anything his friends can boast of, but because it all shows the love and thoughtfulness of his father and mother.

"You've got the nicest room in the house now, Justin," says Sue as she sits down and takes a survey, "it's lovely, but where do you sleep?"

"Oh, in there," pointing to a door. "I'm afraid it's too untidy at present for visitors. And you see this door leads into a big cupboard with a little window, where I can keep all sorts of odd things, guns, and fishing tackle, and my lathe is there."

Rupert drops into a chair and gives a great sigh, while Val is soon busy over the contents of the cupboard.

"You're an awfully lucky fellow, Justin," remarks Rupert. "Why, if I'd *half* what you've got I should be ready to go straight out of my mind with delight."

"I used to feel," says Justin, leaning back against the mantelpiece, "that I would give everything I had, except my father and mother, if I could have all the brothers and sisters that make your home so lively. You don't know how lonely I used to feel here! I did all I could not to show it, but my father and mother both found it out. Now that I have you all, of course it is different—I have two homes instead of one, and each is perfect in its own way. I scarcely know which seems most home-like."

"Oh! by the way, Sue, I think I had better tell you—Justin has started a new treasure box—such a beauty;

leather outside, lined with violet velvet, and he always keeps it locked, and won't let me see what is in it. I thought I'd inform you, as you seem to be his conscience-keeper."

Justin only laughs.

"He is as curious as—I beg your pardon, Sue, I was going to say as a woman, but I won't, because I find that men are quite as curious as women. He is always bothering me to know what is in that box, but I sha'n't tell him."

"Will you tell me?" asks Sue.

Justin nods, and answers, "Some day."

Then Val emerges from the cupboard in raptures over the lathe, and Justin offers to give him lessons in turning, which offer is most gratefully accepted, and after that they all go down stairs.

Mr. and Mrs. Meadows are much pleased at the young people's raptures over Justin's room, and then they have luncheon.

The afternoon being rather stormy, the carriage is ordered to take Sue home.

The next day when Rupert looks towards the flag staff, he sees a signal raised which he does not understand.

He searches for it in the "code," but it is not there, and concluding that Justin has made a mistake, he throws up the window in order to signal back—and sees Sue leaning from her window with the rope in her hand.

"What's that Justin put up?" he asks with a sudden dark suspicion in his mind.

"He is only talking to me," says Sue very innocently.

What do you mean?" inquires Rupert somewhat fiercely.

"Only that he gave me a private code, and he was using it this morning."

The next moment Rupert slams down his window and retires in great disgust.

"That's just the way with fellows when they get with girls!" says Rupert indignantly, but his wrath is suddenly cooled by a little tap at his door, and Sue comes in.

"Rupert, dear, I came to tell you about this—Justin gave me the code yesterday, and I was afraid you might not like it, but Justin said—he said he thought you wouldn't mind."

"*What* did he say? Those were not his words, Sue," says Rupert somewhat mollified.

"No, dear, he said, 'Rupert won't be such a fool,' but I'll tell him I would rather that he used the old code, and that will make it all right again."

"Nonsense! I don't mind a bit," says Rupert, very much assisted to this decision by Justin's words. "I don't want to understand the nonsense you choose to talk."

"It isn't nonsense, Rupert," says Sue, opening her eyes at him, "he was only telling me to have the Latin grammar out when he came, because he is going to give me a lesson, and he won't have very much time to spare. His father is not very well to-day, and wants him at home."

"Oh!" says Rupert. "I'm sorry Mr. Meadows is not well. But then he is always ill—more or less."

"Yes, and he is so patient with it all. But I must go and find Val's grammar—or may I have yours?—it is rather cleaner, and I shall take my work into the dining-room so as to be ready when Justin comes."

"Look here," says Rupert with a sudden impulse, "if you want any help between whiles, when Justin isn't here, just come to me, and I'll explain anything you like."

"Oh! thank you, how kind of you to offer—I didn't like to ask you, because I thought you hated Latin."

"So I do," answers Rupert promptly, "but when I see Justin giving up his time to teach *my* sister, the least I can do is to offer to help in any way that I can."

Sue runs down to prepare, and Justin soon arrives. He gives such a poor account of his father, that Dr. Rutherford offers to look in and see him, in order to satisfy Justin's anxiety, and this makes the boy much happier.

But when alone with Sue, he says in a low tone,

"I don't think my father will get over this attack as well as the others, and he seemed to think himself worse when I went to see him. He spoke to me of a great many things—about my future—and what I meant to do. I told him, as well as I could, what I hoped and wished, and he seemed satisfied. I am so afraid—well! it is no good anticipating troubles. Where is the Latin Grammar, Sue?"



CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE SCHOOL OF ADVERSITY.

WHEN Mr. Meadows married, eighteen years before, he was a fine, strong, energetic man, full of life and high spirits, only three-and-twenty, and devoted to his pretty young wife. Unfortunately he was also devoted to hunting, and one sad day, about a year after his marriage, he met with a terrible accident in the hunting field. The injury was of a very serious nature, and at first it was thought that he could not live, but after a time he rallied, and though partially recovered, he had never been able to walk a step since that time. Justin was a baby, only a month old, at the time of the accident, so that his father has always been an invalid in his recollection.

When Dr. Rutherford arrives at the Park House, Mr. Meadows is out of pain—the spasms of pain in the heart, which are the result of long years of suffering, are for the moment over, and he lies on the sofa in his room, very pale, but calm and collected.

"I had just sent for you," he says, as Dr. Rutherford enters; "you see how it is with me. The beginning of the end this time. But that is not what I want to speak of. It is about Justin, and the boy's future. He was with me this morning, and I questioned him, and found that his wishes and hopes agree with mine on all subjects."

"He is full young to have any wishes or hopes," answers Dr. Rutherford with a queer little smile; "but what is his profession to be?"

"You think he ought to have one?" asks Mr. Meadows; "he is well off—there is no *need* for him to work."

"And still less need for him to remain idle—if he does, he will get into mischief. Let him study a profession, even if he does not practise it. It will occupy him, and may be useful. What does he wish to be?"

"He thinks of going to the bar."

"Well, let him, and he may turn his knowledge to account. He is full of philanthropic schemes, and a knowledge of law will help him if he gets into Parliament, which he is most likely to do."

"There is one thing more—will you be his guardian? You and his mother. He does not want much looking after, and my wife has managed everything for years, so the estate will be little trouble. Will you undertake this for me?"

"It is but a small return for all you have done for me and mine," answers the doctor. "I shall be very proud to be his guardian, and I am very fond of him."

"Not fonder than he is of you all. He spoke to-day more openly than he has ever done, and he spoke of Sue—"

But at this moment Mr. Meadows catches his breath, and pressing his hand to his side is forced to remain silent. Dr. Rutherford does not leave him for some time, not until he is out of pain; then he says good-bye, and bending over him, asks,

"Shall I break this to Justin, or shall his mother tell him? I think you had better not see him again until he knows, for you have already been hiding your suffering too long for your strength."

"You tell him—it would be too much for his mother, brave as she is. Good-bye. I shall see you again."

"Perhaps," thinks Dr. Rutherford, as he leaves the room.

Justin is more prepared than any of them had imagined. He had seen a very decided change in his father on returning from school, but he is at first shocked and startled by Dr. Rutherford's announcement that the end may come at any minute.

"Then some arrangement must be made about me, for I *can't* go back to Winchester," is all he says, and they of course agree that he shall remain at home for the present.

Rupert is very miserable at the prospect of returning to Winchester without Justin, but he keeps his sorrow to himself—a piece of great self-denial for Sultan Rupert—and only Sue knows how *very* much he feels it.

So when the holidays are ended, Rupert goes back alone, and for the first time for some years, Sue sees his lips quiver as he bids them all good-bye. But his first letter home is very cheerful, and though he speaks of missing Justin, he does not write despondently of his own prospects of enjoyment for that term.

Meanwhile, Sue is constantly at the Park House, for Mr. Meadows is not happy if a day passes without his seeing her. Aunt Cosy murmurs something to her brother about the girl's lessons, but the doctor shakes his head.

"It can't last long, Cosy, and a dying man's happiness is of more importance than French verbs. Let her alone—she is doing a good work over there, and we should be the last to stop it."

And so Sue goes daily to visit Mr. Meadows, and sits with him, either reading or talking—always keeping him happy and amused. When the long fits of pain are over, and Sue comes softly to his side with her pitiful eyes and sympathetic voice, he feels as if a cool, refreshing breeze came and blew into his heart, making it young again. He is happiest when, as he lies with half closed eyes, Justin and Sue begin to talk softly, regardless of his presence, and he hears something in those quiet words, that makes him well contented about his boy's future.

One day, as he lies there, he hears Justin say softly,

"He is very quiet! Do you think he is asleep, Sue?"

"I don't know—he often lies like that when I am with him, and he is not asleep. Don't make any noise to disturb him! Where is your mother?"

"I asked her to go out for a little while as you were here."

"Why did not you go with her, Justin? You are looking very tired, poor boy."

"Oh! I'm all right. I didn't want to miss your visit—for I don't see much of you now, except when you are here. Besides, I don't like leaving you alone."

"Why?" asks Sue.

"For fear—for fear anything should happen."

"Oh!" then with a furtive look at the sofa, and in a voice of mingled pity and awe; "will it be sudden?"

"Probably—your father says."

"How good and patient he is! He never grumbles at anything, or complains—you can only tell when he is in pain by watching him, and listening to how he draws his breath. I am so glad when I can do anything for him!"

"I am so glad you have known my father, Sue!"

"So am I! I am sure knowing him has done me a great deal of good in every way."

"Yes, but I don't mean that. I am afraid it was only selfish gladness, that I should always have some one who has known my father, and loved him as he deserved."

"Oh! yes, it is fortunate that we live so near, and that when you are at home you can come in as often as you like."

"Yes, it is very fortunate for me—but you won't always be at home, Sue."

"Oh! yes, I shall—as long as I am wanted there."

"But suppose you find you are wanted somewhere else?"

Sue shakes her head slowly, but with a little smile.

"I shall never be wanted elsewhere *half* as much as at home. I am so shy with strangers, and I like home better than any other place in the world."

"Better than this house?" asks Justin, with the slightest possible change in his voice.

"Oh, I don't mean that! Somehow this house and

ours have got mixed up, so that I don't know which is most like home."

"That's just what I feel about the Cottage," says Justin in a very satisfied tone, "so you see that is fortunate for both of us. It is nice to have two homes, isn't it, Sue?"

"Yes, very, when they are such homes as ours. Justin, your father has moved."

"Yes, but his eyes are shut, we are not disturbing him. He had a very bad night, and I hope is resting now."

"And you were up with him?"

"Only part of the time. He will not let me stay very long, he is so considerate, and thinks of every one before himself."

There is a pause, and Mr. Meadows opens his eyes. Sue sits near him, work in hand, her box is on the small round table where Justin sits with a book before him, but upon which he does not look, as he leans on his folded arms, his eyes fixed on Sue.

"Justin," says his father, quietly, "I have just been disproving the proverb about listeners."

Justin only turns his head and smiles, while Sue looks up, saying,

"We hoped you were resting, dear Mr. Meadows. Have you not slept at all?"

"No, your talk rests me better than any sleep. Justin, give me that box which is on the table."

Justin holds it, while Mr. Meadows lifts the lid. He turns over one or two things inside, then murmuring, "Ah! this is it," he draws out a tiny case, and Justin replaces the box on the table.

"Sue, I want you to take this and wear it sometimes, as a remembrance of me, not for the value, but because I gave it. Open the case."

Sue touches the spring, and the case opens. There, on a blue velvet background, sparkles a small, but very beautiful diamond crescent. The flash of the stones is quite eclipsed by something that comes sparkling from Sue's eyes, as she says impulsively,

"Oh, it's too lovely! but I want nothing to remember you by! I shall always do that! always! always!"

"Still you may as well keep my little moon, Sue, and I should like you to make me one promise."

"Yes, I will gladly promise anything."

"Rash girl! But my request is an easy one to comply with. Will you promise me to wear that crescent on the days that you feel especially glad, and are expecting more happiness than usual, and to think of me then? Will you do this for me, Sue?"

"Oh, yes, I will, I will! That is only too easy, I am afraid. I would do something much more difficult to please you."

"All in good time," answers Mr. Meadows enigmatically.

And then Mrs. Meadows comes in, and tells Sue that it is time for her to go home. Justin says he will walk with her to the Park gate, and she rises to say good-bye.

Mr. Meadows takes her hand, and for a moment seems unable to let her go; then drawing her down to him, he says, "Kiss me, my daughter," and when she has done so, he releases her, and she goes away.

Outside the room she breaks down and cries bitterly

for a moment, but there is a look of pain in Justin's face that soon makes her dry her tears for his sake, and they walk to the gate talking fairly cheerfully.

Next morning early, as Sue stands at the dining-room window before breakfast, she sees Justin coming. For a moment she thinks Mr. Meadows must be worse, but Justin is not hurrying, he is walking on the contrary very slowly, looking intently on the ground. Then the truth flashes upon her, and she goes softly out to meet him.

"Poor Justin!" she says, putting her hand on his arm, as he makes an effort to speak. "I am so sorry for you! When did it happen?"

"Early this morning. He just saw the day break, and then—"

"He didn't suffer, I hope!"

"Oh, no, it was very sudden—we thought at first that he had fainted—but—but—" Justin makes a fierce struggle with his emotion, and for the time he is successful. "I thought I'd come over and tell you—it was better than doing nothing at home, and mother is resting. You'll come and see mother, Sue?"

"Oh! perhaps she won't like to see me yet."

"Yes, she will, she told me to say so. She is very brave, so you need not be afraid to come."

"Oh! Justin, how *can* you bear it so quietly? It would break my heart if—"

"Yes, I know; but think how he suffered, think of the years of helplessness he spent in that dreadful chair. It is different when any one who is strong and enjoys life is taken, but for him it is no more suffering—none of those dreadful fits of pain and depression. Oh! I have felt

sometimes this morning, that he is rejoicing in his freedom, and I have rejoiced too. But by-and-by I shall miss him, I do not understand it yet."

Sue can only put her hands on his shoulders and look at him with eyes full of pity and affection.

"I must go now," he says, bending forward and lightly touching her forehead with his lips. "*He* called you 'daughter,' and you are a dear, good little sister to me."

And then he goes away somewhat comforted.



CHAPTER XXXI.

COMINGS AND GOINGS.

A QUIET week, and then a quiet funeral, follow Mr. Meadows' death, and afterwards they all try to go back to their old ways.

Sue is much busier now with her lessons than she has been for some time, Rupert is at Winchester, where Justin would like to be, but, for the present, his mother cannot part from him. So, as he is anxious to waste no time, he asks Dr. Rutherford to make some arrangement with the clergyman, in order that he may go for a couple of hours daily, and read with him. Mr. Maxwell, the Vicar, being very fond of Justin, makes no objection, and Justin is thankful to be again occupied, and works well.

Dr. Rutherford is not a little surprised, when Mr. Meadows' will is read, to find that Justin is heir to a great deal more than he had supposed. The quiet way in which Mr. Meadows always lived, had made the doctor disbelieve certain stories that were told in the neighbourhood of the enormous wealth of the Meadows family, of

which Justin is the sole representative. But after reading the will, he thinks that somehow or other, rumour has, if anything, understated the sum.

Mrs. Meadows has now only one anxiety, which is, that Justin should learn to make a good use of his money, and keep that generous, unselfish heart, which he has inherited from his father. And they have no reason to fear for him. His father's illness and death have made a deep impression upon him, and Dr. Rutherford is struck, even on the day of the funeral, by how much more manly he has become since this trouble came upon him.

When the summer holidays begin, and Rupert comes home, he seems so much more of a boy than Justin, though the latter soon recovers his accustomed cheerfulness, and is at times as high-spirited and mirth-loving as Rupert and Val can wish. Rupert's birthday, which comes towards the end of the Midsummer holidays, is celebrated by a pic-nic in the woods, beyond the Park, and they are a very happy party.

Justin is there, for nothing is complete without Justin now, and as they are only a family party, it is a very lively affair, and free from all restraint.

Rachel and Thomas are there, unpacking the hamper, and Mrs. Turrell is trying to find out the coolest and most sheltered spot from the sun's rays, and Rupert is at her right hand.

Val—and Jack Hartley, commonly known as "The Inseparables," lie on the grass near Floss, who is making a daisy chain for Eve, while Paul and Syd run to and fro, gathering the flowers, and Eve sits with her lap full of the little white stars.

Sue is a little apart from the others, knitting, and Justin stands by her, leaning against a tree.

"Ain't we pastoral!" says Val suddenly, with a slightly mocking laugh; "Floss weaving garlands, and Justin looking for all the world like a Strephon, or Damon, or Corydon—or any of those idiotic shepherds."

"Thank you!" says Justin with a little bow; "and what are you, pray?"

"I'm the poet, of course. Jack is the—the—*swain*, who does something or other. Hang it all! I never *could* talk poetry!"

"Is this the first time you have discovered that interesting fact?" asks Justin, determined to pay him back in his own coin; "I am afraid your family knew it long ago."

"Ah! my family never appreciate me! Jack does, don't you, old fellow? He enters into the spirit of my words, and they find an echo in his own breast! Eh, Jack?"

"*How much?*" exclaims Jack starting, as Val pokes him in the ribs with a stick; "I wasn't listening."

They all laugh at Valentine's expression of despair as he drops back on the grass, murmuring,

"Et tu, Brute!"

Then Dr. Rutherford joins the group, and the picnic begins in earnest. There is all the usual handing of plates and filling of glasses, and difficulty of disposing of the glasses when filled, and the usual number of wasps join the party, uninvited, and Eve is discovered to be sitting on an ant-hill. But these little drawbacks only serve to heighten the enjoyment, and the discomfort—which is

part of the enjoyment, and the pic-nic is voted a great success by all the company.

The soft murmur of the river—for the pic-nic is held on the river bank—makes a pleasant accompaniment to their own lively chatter, and when Rupert's health has been drunk in iced lemonade, they all leave Rachel and Thomas to eat their own dinners, and walk away, following the bends of the river.

"Let us sit down here," says Justin, finding that he and Sue are far ahead of the rest, "I've been wanting to tell you—but I wouldn't before, that I am going away next week."

"Going! where?" asks Sue, lifting a very startled face.

"First to London, then back to Winchester when Rupert goes. I must begin to work again, because I mean to be called to the bar, as soon as I can after I leave Oxford. I am sorry that I have to leave home, because of mother—but you will be very good to her, Sue, and see her as often as you can. It is better both for her and for me, that I should go away. Until I am gone, mother will not rouse herself enough to look after everything as she used, and though I love her so dearly, I feel that when I am so much alone with her, I am growing into a soft-headed, spoilt, mother's boy. Your father says I am right to go."

"Yes," says Sue, she knows he is right, but it is difficult to acknowledge it sometimes, when *right* is not as pleasant as *wrong*. Then she adds,

"Does Rupert know?"

"I have not told him yet. He will be glad, I dare say, though he has learnt to do without me by this time.

I think, next to my mother, you will miss me most, Sue."

"I don't know," says Sue looking away, "I shall miss you *dreadfully*, but so will the others. When do you go up to college?"

"Next year. I shall work as hard as I can now, and then, when the time comes, I shall go to Oxford, and when I have taken my degree, I must be off to London to read law and eat dinners, and such things. I do not mean to be idle."

"Oh! no, that would never do for you. But *next* week! That is very sudden! Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Because I knew it would only vex you, and spoil the holidays, so I thought I would not tell you till after the picnic. You see I flattered myself you would be sorry!"

"Yes, and so I am! What day do you leave the Park House? The end of next week?"

"No—on Tuesday. I go to my uncle's in London for a few days."

"Oh, Justin!"

There is a moment's silence, then Justin softly strokes the hand that lies listless at Sue's side, and says,

"Sue—your father took me to task some time ago about you—he says I have made you waste too much of your time, and he is right. We have got into bad habits; and after all it will not be very long that I shall be away! I shall stay at home all the holidays to see my mother—and you."

"Yes," answers Sue again, but she says no more.

"Come, little sister! where is your courage gone?"

You don't know how hard it is for me to tell you all this—and when you look—as you do now—I begin to wish that I had gone off without even saying good-bye.”

“I am very glad you didn't !”

“Then make me glad too ! Sue, in three years and a half, I shall come of age, and after that I shall be at home very often—as often as I possibly can. Three years and a half does not seem *very* long, does it ?”

“Yes, very long—when I look back three years and a half.”

“Ah ! but it won't seem so long. Sue, what are you doing ?”

For Sue is unclasping something from her neck ; the next moment he sees it is his father's diamond crescent.

“I cannot wear it to-day—I am too unhappy !” she says impulsively, though she does not look at Justin.

“I shall not put it on again until you boys all come back !”

“Sue ! do you want me to scold you ? Put on that brooch again, and don't talk nonsense ! You will soon find occasions for wearing it again. You can wear it every time you get a letter from Winchester, and every time you go and see my mother, and when we all come home. You will find a hundred and one occasions that will happen to please you, between next Tuesday and the day we shall meet again. Come, Sue, put it on, or we shall be the laughing-stock of the family.”

Rather unwillingly, Sue consents, and before the others have joined them, she is able to look much the same as usual.

She finds her father most sympathetic, her only trouble

is that Rupert and Val cannot understand why *Sue* should mind Justin's departure so much, and Rupert says decidedly,

"I could understand it if you had ever been at Winchester with Justin, and had to go back without him, as *I* did ; but when you have only to be at home, and wait till he comes back—I do not see what you have to feel sorry about !"

"I don't want to lose *all* my brothers at once," says Sue, with a very undignified sniff. "I should not mind *half* as much if Val was not going away too !"

"What, *all* my little chickens and their dam, at one fell swoop !" quotes Rupert, laughing mischievously.

"Let her alone, Rupert," says his father, interposing to shield Sue ; "it is very natural for her to feel sorry—after all that has passed, and having been so much with Justin all these weeks. Sue is a good girl, and a brave one, as you will find out some day."

And after *that*, Sue feels she must act up to her father's words, as he has intended that she should. Nothing of any further interest occurs until Justin goes away, which he does on the Tuesday as arranged. Valentine has been on his promised visit to Ffrench, and when the holidays come to an end, and Rupert goes back to Winchester with Val and Jack Hartley, Ffrench at once joins "the Inseparables," and becomes one of them.

As for Sue, she does her best to make up for lost time, and works hard at her lessons—at lessons of all kinds, for Aunt Cosy makes her study the household books, to learn that useful and old-fashioned art, the mysteries of housekeeping. Cook always welcomes the

morning when Sue appears in the kitchen, and bares her pretty white arms, ready to learn any new dish that cook may be able to teach her.

Floss, in the mean time, is losing her priggish ways, and finds, to her relief, that the boys do not tease her half as much as before.

And now we must take leave of them all for a long time.



CHAPTER XXXII.

GOOD-BYE TO "SISTER SUE."

IT is three years and a half since we saw Sue sitting with Justin in a melancholy mood on the bank of the river.

Three whole years and a half! and I am sure it would be difficult to recognise *some* of the little Rutherfords.

Begin in the nursery—oh! of course you recognise that chubby child—that is Eve!

I beg your pardon, that is Phyllis the baby, remember it is three years and a half since you saw her last.

That little girl of eight years old, who is sitting in the corner with her doll, *that* is Eve. She has a look of Sue in her blue eyes and fluffy golden hair.

Paul and Sydney are at that nondescript age, eleven and ten, and are a couple of noisy, small boys, in every one's way, and turning up on all the most awkward occasions.

In the dining-room—who is the pretty, neat-looking

girl, with brown curly hair, who stands in the window? It is not Sue—so it must be Floss. How she has grown, and how she has improved! She is now fourteen, and is following in Sue's footsteps in learning to be gentle and considerate towards others.

Val, now a "young man" of seventeen, is very like what Rupert was at his age, only much fairer. He is at this moment in the armchair, his eyes fixed on the fire, and his feet resting, American fashion, on the low mantel-shelf.

The door opens, and a brown-haired, brown-moustached young man enters, and sets very carefully upon the table the covered picture frame he has been carrying.

And after Rupert comes Sue.

Would you know her? Yes, if you think twice, though it is hard to believe that the slim, tall girl of nineteen can be our Sister Sue!

But she comes in with the same sweet laugh, and says,

"Here it is, Val, I have been in terror lest Rupert should drop it," and she unveils the picture.

It is a large and beautifully-coloured photograph of Dr. Rutherford, that they are going to give, as a joint present, to Justin on the twenty-first anniversary of his birthday, which is to-day.

"Isn't it lovely, and like father?" asks Sue, "and I know Justin will like it so much. Now, Rupert, you must go and get ready. Remember, we are to be at the Park House by twelve o'clock."

"All right, I'll be ready in five minutes—which is more than you'll be, Sukey!"

And away rushes Rupert, followed by the rest of the family.

In a short time they are all on their way to the Park House, followed more soberly by Dr. Rutherford and Mrs. Turrell, and at the very gate, Justin is standing to receive them.

He is nearly deafened by congratulations, and his hand almost squeezed to a jelly.

Rupert has carried the picture—he will allow no one else to touch it, and then and there he presents it to Justin from the assembled family, and the hand-shaking begins again, for Justin has to thank each member individually.

What is Justin like by this time, do you ask?

He is like any tall young man of one-and-twenty, with a fine figure, a clear, healthy look in his bright face, a head of curly brown hair, and a pair of particularly good, blue eyes.

He is the hero of the day, and as such, looks a hero in their eyes, but to the world at large he is merely a very nice looking and agreeable young man.

There are all kinds of rejoicings for the day, which is clear, bright, and just sufficiently frosty to be pleasant. There is to be a dinner given to the tenants in the great barn near the stables, and then in the evening—or rather as soon as it is sufficiently dark—there is to be a display of fireworks.

Mrs. Meadows has asked some friends who live near, to come in the afternoon and see the fireworks, while the four eldest Rutherfords, with Dr. Rutherford and Mrs. Turrell, are to stay and spend the evening; the younger

ones, having seen the fireworks, are to be sent home with Rachel.

Such a lovely day it is, in spite of the cold. The air is intensely still, and every sound rings clearly out.

Just as they are entering the house, a sudden peal of bells rings out from the church steeple near, and they all pause to listen.

"That's for you, Master Justin," says Dr. Rutherford, who loves to tease Justin now and then; "they have determined to pay you some compliment, though you are so modest. Just listen to them! They are ringing with a will!"

"That is that tiresome Saunders, I have no doubt," says Justin a little disgusted. "I told him I wouldn't have it, and he has not chosen to attend to me."

"It's like a wedding!" says Floss pensively.

"Perhaps Justin *is* going to be married," suggests Sydney, as a very bright idea.

"Too late to-day," says Justin, turning away with a laugh; "it is past twelve, Syd, and I have no special licence."

In the house, they find Mrs. Meadows, and she welcomes them gladly, particularly Sue, who has always been her special pet.

Then Sue has to see all the other presents, and the gardener brings in great bunches of lovely hot-house flowers for her to arrange in the rooms, before the visitors arrive, while Rupert and Val string up all the flags to make the garden look as festive as possible, and Floss hovers about, helping every one in turn, and somewhat disconcerting Justin, who wants to be alone with Sue.

"You are wearing father's crescent, I hope, Sue," he says, hovering round her as she puts the flowers in their glasses.

"Why, of *course*!" she answers, not looking at him. "Did you think I should not wear it to-day, of all days? Justin!—How does that flower look—rather too big, doesn't it?"

"Y—yes, perhaps it does. You know best. Let the flowers alone for a minute, Sue. I've something to say to you," and as Sue looks up, Floss dances in.

"Oh! it is all so nice and festive!" she says eagerly; "and, Justin, Jacob says he has some collie puppies, and he will give me one, if you will let him."

"Do you want a collie? Have one then, by all means. Won't you go with Jacob and look at them?"

"Oh! yes, I will if I can find him," and she goes out. Justin stands one moment silent, then as he turns and says "Sue!" the door is flung open again, and Floss reappears.

"I say, Sue, won't you come and see the puppies with me? Jacob's waiting."

Sue puts down the flowers and looks doubtful, but Justin answers decidedly,

"No, Floss, Sue will come later with me;" and Floss has to go off alone with Jacob.

"Well, I've got rid of her for the present," thinks Justin with an air of relief, but he has hardly turned round before Val comes in, and with a slight shrug, Justin gives it up as hopeless.

Then they have lunch, and a wildly high-spirited party they are, and after lunch, Rupert, Val, Floss, and Sue,

all go up into Justin's room to look at some of the new things he has there.

Rupert goes round the room touching everything, and at last he holds up a small, leather box, calling out,

"Hullo! Justin, this is the new treasure-box! now confess what is in it!"

"It is not new now," answers Justin; "you forget how long ago I had it. Give it to me. I did not know I had left it out."

But Rupert likes to tease Justin, and gives the box a little toss, saying laughingly,

"I'll make you a bid for its contents."

"They would be worth nothing to you," replies Justin, looking a little anxiously at the box Rupert is still tossing.

Unfortunately it is not locked as Rupert has supposed, and as he gives it another fling, it comes open and a shower of old letters fall to the floor.

Rupert makes a sound of dismay, and Justin, for a moment, looks really vexed, as he stoops hastily to gather them up.

"I beg your pardon, I'm awfully sorry!" says Rupert stooping also, for he is afraid that the letters are from Justin's father, and that he will feel pained at their treatment, but when he begins to help and sees the writing, he gives a little start, and one quick look into Justin's face.

Fortunately, Valentine and Floss are busy over the lathe, and Sue has not noticed, as she is standing by the cupboard door. Then Rupert looks up and says quietly, but in a very different tone to the careless one in which he has been chaffing Justin,

"There's no harm done, no one saw."

"All right," answers Justin, with his usual smile, "don't say a word about it," and then he puts the box carefully away.

The first visitor arrives a few minutes later, and they all go down, and for the rest of the afternoon Justin has little to do but listen to, and answer, congratulations, until he is weary. At four o'clock, the tenants have their dinner in the barn, and Justin goes out to receive more congratulations, and have his hand nearly shaken off. He is very popular with them all, and finds that he cannot get off without making a little speech to them, which they all expect and demand of him. So he stands up (much to the delight of Val and Floss, who are longing to hear what he will say) and begins, half laughing and with a rising colour,

"My good friends, I don't know why you should want me to make you a speech—I am not in the habit of making them—but as I can't come of age more than once in my life, this can't be made a precedent for any other occasion. I am very much obliged to you all for the good-will you have shown me, and I hope we shall continue the best of friends all our lives."

There is great applause at this, and then Justin, like many a young speaker, has some difficulty in bringing his speech to a conclusion in the proper manner.

"I am very much obliged to you for coming to-day, and I hope you will all enjoy yourselves," (murmurs of approval.) "I—I don't know that I shall ever have another speech to make to you," (then a voice, evidently Jacob's, calls out, "Yes, sir, the day you're married, Mr.

ustin.") Justin stops, colours, falters, and exclaiming, "Very well, then I'll keep what I was going to say till then," retreats amid a storm of applause and laughter.

As soon as the dinner is over, the fireworks are let off, and then all the visitors go away.

When they are gone, Justin races up to his room, and on the landing stands Sue—alone.

"Come in here," he says in his most masterful tone, throwing open the door of his study, and determined not to lose this opportunity, "I *must* speak to you."

And Sue obeys with some slight hesitation.

"Sue, dear, I promised your father not to say a word to you until to-day," says Justin, speaking quickly, as if out of breath, "but I am not going to wait an hour longer. This house isn't home to me without you, Sue, and I don't care for anything I have unless you will share it with me. Will you? Can you care enough for '*that* Meadows boy?'"

And Sue, half reproachfully at his still remembering her unlucky speech, and half laughing at his comical look, gives him the answer he wants. Life looks all rose-colour to them both as they stand there in their love and youth; there is not one cloud in their sky, not one shadow in their hearts.

The next moment the door is flung open, and Floss appears.

"Justin, where's Sue? Oh, *there* you are!" she says, "I have been looking for you both. Here they are," he calls out, and Rupert and Val rush in.

Val holds in his hand a sheet of paper, while his rother in vain tries to stop and silence him.

"I say, Sue," exclaims Val, "you should see what Justin does with your old letters! I found this lying on the floor in here, and I recognised the familiar scrawl as 'Sister Sue's.'"

Justin rapidly secures the letter, one that had been dropped and not picked up, and says with a laughing look at Rupert,

"You may chaff as much as you like *now*, Val, for there's an end of *Sister Sue*!"



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